SAINT GABRIEL, PASSIONIST

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SAINT GABRIEL PASSIONIST

By

FATHER CAMILLUS, C.P.

With

Preface by His Eminence

WILLIAM CARDINAL O'CONNELL

Archbishop of Boston

NEW YORK

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

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To the Catholic Youth
of America, Whose
Faith a Godless World
Would Pervert by Its
Infidel Philosophy, and
Whose Morals It
Would Corrupt by Its Unbridled Sensuality, We Dedicate This Life Story of a Youth of Our Own Times Who, by Following the Philosophy and Morality of the Cross,—to the World, Indeed, Folly, but to Them That Are Saved, the Wisdom and the Power of God,
—Achieved the Greatest Success, and Attained the Most Exalted Honor, and Won a Name That Will Be Glorious Until the End of Time, Thus Realizing the Highest Ambition to Which the Heart of Any Christian Youth May Aspire

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PREFACE

There seems to be a growing desire on the part of the Catholics of to-day to find in the lives of saintly Christian men and women an escape from the flood of putrid literature which, for the past ten years or more, has deluged the bookshelves and the libraries of our great cities.

We had already witnessed this growing tide of nauseating stories of sex and sex problems and sex hygiene and sex complexes before the advent of the great war, and we had hoped that the grief and the sorrow which usually accompany war, and always follow it, would purge the minds of popular writers and the hearts of the people, to such a degree that the foulness of the literary atmosphere would be cleansed at last and that once more writers would turn to saner and cleaner topics, and readers to books worth while reading.

But it seemed, for a time at least, that matters in this line grew worse. Here and there,

however, a gleam of pure literary light emerged, and the success, quite general, of the sweet, lovely tale of Maria Chapdelaine, revealed the welcome fact that at last the worst was over and the public, at least the Catholic public, had turned from emptiness and worse to sane, normal, wholesome reading. It was high time.

And now, as usual, once the public is on the right track, the desire for better things to read is growing rapidly.

The minds which have found only disappointment and emptiness in a false romanticism and a nasty realism, can no longer be satisfied with the baneful repetitions of the same sex and social problems never solved, and at last give promising signs of yearning for the real romance and the fine realism of the lives of good men and women who have faced life and its solemn duties, and have solved its ever-insistent problems by perseverance and fidelity to the highest supernatural principles.

In reality, though the saints were of all people always the most sensible, their lives inevitably breathe the fascination of the finest romance.

Whatever their position in life, invariably they understood the language of the soul's best aspirations, and they set out upon their quest of the true and the beautiful like veritable knights and great ladies.

In their wanderings they leave always a trail of mystic glory which weaves into golden threads all the commonplaces of their daily existence. And the more the biographer adheres to simple truth, simply told, the more fascinating becomes the story.

Hitherto it has been difficult to find in our language, and I think often more difficult in other tongues, the lives of God's heroes and heroines just as they lived them. It takes a saint to understand a saint—that is, to give him the value which God sets upon his actions; not what the world likes. And the lives of many of the greatest saints will have to be rewritten according to those standards.

It is not necessary, indeed it is futile, to weave romance and a false glamour about God's heroes. The romance is there already in all its stark glory if only we do not attempt to deck it out in tawdry tinsel and paper flowers.

Let the simplicity of greatness alone; let it

shine by its own heavenly brightness. Let real actions speak for themselves; otherwise we shall hear not the voice of God, but the buzz of the phonograph—always at best a poor reproduction of a great original.

It seems to me that all this is becoming better understood of late and soon, let us hope, we shall have more of the Lives of the Saints breathing the beauty of absolute simplicity and unvarnished truth.

Along these lines comes a life of "Saint Gabriel, Passionist," the youth of only yesterday, who to-day is venerated as a saint.

That his life seemed to his contemporaries rather commonplace—that is to say, very much like their own—is clear. They, like us, were rather accustomed to consider saints as wonder-workers only. Of course they and we ought to know that the word *saint* means *holy* —just that. But somehow, we had got meanings rather mixed, and God took the life of Saint Gabriel to unteach us first, and then to teach us.

To live a normal life dedicated to God's glory, that is the lesson we need most in these days of spectacular posing and movie heroes. And that a normal life, lived only for God,

quite simply, quite undramatically, but very seriously, each little task done with a happy supernaturalism,—that such a life means sainthood, surely Saint Gabriel teaches us; and it is a lesson well worth learning by all of us.

Up high in the mountains of Abruzzi, Saint Gabriel lived his daily life, simply, seriously, joyfully, because he lived entirely for God.

And this saint of Abruzzi has, against every rule of worldly logic, become more famous than all the heroes of the great war. When their names shall be forgotten, his name will shine with the glory of God.

✠ WILLIAM CARDINAL O'CONNELL.

Archbishop's House,
Boston, Mass.
Feast of St. Matthias,
February 24, 1923.

SAINT GABRIEL, PASSIONIST

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

DAWN was just breaking behind the white peak of the Gran Sasso. Father Norbert looked at the gray streaks upon the dark sky for a few moments, and then fixed his eyes again on the young man at whose bedside he had been watching since midnight. There could be no doubt that the life of the frail youth was rapidly nearing its close; and it was apparent, too, that the realization of this fact was deeply affecting the gentle priest. The pent-up memories of more than five years were stirring in his soul, and were forcing open the strong barriers which long habits of solitude, prayer and austerity had built up against what is called, in asceticism, human attachments. Religious though he was, and well accustomed to the

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rigorous self-discipline imposed by the principles and practices of monastic life, it was, nevertheless, difficult for him to control the emotions now throbbing vehemently within his heart.

They had lived together, this youth and Father Norbert, in the intimacy of the closest and tenderest of friendships. They had met for the first time one September evening some six years before. The youth had come to the priest then in all the excitement and enthusiasm of a boy who had just made his life's decision. He was a winsome lad, tall, graceful and slender, with face and features almost classic in their lines. His eyes, glistening with the lustre of youth, were large and dark, and his hair curled in thick, black clusters over a broad forehead that indicated quick intelligence and a strong personality. His carriage was that of one who had sprung from a long line of noble forbears, and his temperament was buoyant and vivacious. That the decision he had reached was marshalling into intense activity all the energies of his resolute nature, was evident from his whole demeanor as he explained to the priest his purpose in seeking admission to the monastery.

At first he regarded Father Norbert as a pupil regards his teacher,—as the master to whom he had come for instruction in the method of life which he had decided to follow. But as the weeks and months passed on, the priest became more than the guide who was directing his steps in paths that led to consequences reaching into eternity itself; more even than the guardian of his conscience and the keeper of his soul, to whom all the secrets of his young life were bared. As the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, so, too, his soul became knit with that of the priest.

In like manner, Father Norbert became fonder and fonder still of the boy. He came to regard him as a kind of sacred treasure which, in some strange way, had been confided to his keeping, and for which he felt himself entirely responsible. His quick perception of character discerned at once the impressionableness of the lad's nature. He was persuaded, too, that there was in him the stuff of which exceptional men are made. And so he determined to educate him to what is highest and best in Christianity. He cherished him as carefully as does a gardener

some rare flower which he would cultivate to perfect beauty. Thus their relationship developed into one of those mysterious intimacies which are more sacred and sympathetic than the tenderest of human affections: an intimacy frequently found among God's saints when they have been purged of what is carnal and earthly.

From the very outstart, the boy responded fully to Father Norbert's solicitude. With a ready docility he yielded to all his wise counsels; and thus, gradually, a beautiful transformation took place within him, until, at last, his soul reflected the very sinlessness and unselfishness that signalizes the near-followers of Christ. With admiring eyes the priest watched the transformation; and as he beheld it, his soul rejoiced and humbly he thanked God for deigning to raise up another sainted one whose holiness would magnify His Name.

Father Norbert was now pondering all this as he gazed at the young man lying on the little white bed before him. He saw the serene look of patient waiting that reposed upon the features, and the smile of fond devotedness that played about the lips of this

young man as he turned his eyes to the crucifix and image of the Madonna clasped to his breast. He observed, too, how wasted and worn the body had become with the ravages of the consuming disease which had seized the young life and blighted all its fair promise, leaving only the wreck of the handsome boy he had first met that September evening not quite six years before. The hectic flush upon the cheek, and the feverish light in the eyes, imparted a peculiar beauty, indeed, to the waxen and emaciated face, but it was a beauty pathetic in its foreboding of death's near approach. As thus he beheld the lovely flower which he had cared for so tenderly, and which he had seen bud and bloom as it exhaled its exquisite fragrance, and as he realized that soon all that would remain of its loveliness was the memory and the lingering perfume, small wonder was it, that his heart was heavy and that unshed tears trembled in his eyes.

. . . . . .

Mournfully the monastery bell tolled its knell for a departing soul. One by one, the black-robed and sandalled monks filed solemnly into the little room. On bended knees

they encircled the bed, holding lighted tapers in their hand: and then the low murmur of their voices was heard as they responded to the litanies and prayers of the Church's ritual for the dying.

"Depart, O Christian soul," Father Norbert prayed with suppliant voice, "out of this sinful world, in the name of God, the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus, the Son of the Living God, who suffered and died for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee; in the name of the Angels and Archangels, Thrones and Dominations, Cherubim and Seraphim; in the name of the Patriarchs and Prophets; of the holy Apostles and Evangelists; of the holy Martyrs and Confessors; of the holy Monks and Hermits; of the holy Virgins, and of all the Saints of God. Let peace come to thee this day, and let thy abode be in Holy Sion, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The sun had now risen higher in the heavens, making the snow on the Gran Sasso glisten with iridescent splendor, as though troops of angels had encamped there while waiting to carry the soul of the expiring youth in triumph to their King. A beam of the

bright sunlight suddenly darted through the window and veiled the white couch with golden glory. It was the herald of the Angel of Death, who entered a moment later.

A strange light kindled in the eyes of the youth as though they were ravished with the contemplation of some blessed vision; and a soft radiance, like the dimmed reflex from the effulgence of heavenly visitors, shone from his face. His ears seemed straining to catch the sound of approaching music, and his lips moved in unspoken words. Summoning the little strength that remained to him, he made an effort to rise and reach out his arms in glad welcome; and then sank back upon his pillow, and was dead.

The monks bowed their heads in lowly reverence as though they were kneeling in the presence of the divine, and the hush of eternity seemed to be upon their souls.

Father Norbert arose from his knees and cast one long, lingering look at the dead youth. Pointing to the corpse, he whispered in a voice choked with emotion: "Behold, a saint has passed away!" and then hurried to the solitude of his cell.

All this happened some sixty years ago in

the old monastery of the Passionist Fathers, at Isola del Gran Sasso, in far off Italy, the land of tender romances and of so many saintly lives.

Isola del Gran Sasso is a quaint peasant village, situated about thirty miles inland from the shores of the Adriatic, and nestling in the shadow of one of the highest mountains of the Apennines. It is called Isola del Gran Sasso (Isle of the High Rock) because it is surrounded almost entirely by two narrow rivers, the Temperino and the Mavone, which wind themselves around it in serpentine curves; and because it is located at the base of the gigantic Gran Sasso, whose bare and rocky peak tapers, snow clad, nearly ten thousand feet into the sky.

This mountain is one of the remarkable and picturesque sights of Italy. It presents a scene of sublime majesty hardly equalled in the whole of Europe. Around its giant feet stretch broad acres of fertile pasture fields, studded here and there with olive groves and small vineyards. Forests of dark firs and green beeches climb up its sides until the barren rock forbids their further approach. Deep ravines and jungles of wild underbrush

are concealed beneath the thick foliage of the trees, and glimpses into their depths may be had only when the sun darts its penetrating rays into their dark recesses. There are times when, stirred by the passing breezes and gilded with the brilliant sunbeams, these forests seem like the giant's armour of greenish gold: and then, again, they are as sombre and still as the pall of death. For hundreds of feet above the last traces of vegetation, the great rock towers in a line almost perpendicular, its face smoothed and polished by the winds and rain and sunshine of unnumbered centuries. Sometimes it appears like a vast mirror reflecting the slowly drifting clouds above and the shadows of the waving trees below. As it rises higher still, its brow is furrowed with deep and irregular crevices, and at last, on its summit rests the crown of eternal snow. For leagues on every side, it may be seen glinting in the sunlight as though thousands of jewels had been strewn upon it by nature's lavish hand. Like a prepotent monarch, it looks down serenely from its exalted height upon the lesser peaks, as they gradually dwindle into the little hills that encompass the valley below.

But, perhaps, we have digressed too far in thus portraying the setting of our story. And, maybe, the reader is inquiring anxiously: Who was he, this youth? And why did Father Norbert call him a saint?

If the gentle reader will follow our narrative, he shall know.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND BOYHOOD

WHEN, on the first day of March, 1838, Signora Agnes Possenti looked into the eyes of the babe that God had just given her, perhaps her mother love may have conjured up many a fair vision of her little darling's future. But we have no hesitancy in asserting that the most extravagant dream of her fancy could hardly have led her to imagine that one day he would be honored as a saint. And when, on the same day, Signor Sante Possenti carried the child to the cathedral church of Assisi for the sacrament of baptism, it is not likely that he had even the slightest intimation how, less than eighty years later, this son of his would be enshrined among the canonized heroes of the universal Church.

The fact that the child was christened in the same font in which the great Francis of Assisi had been baptized more than six hun-

dred years before, and that he was given the very name borne by that unique marvel of Christlikeness, did not lend any particular significance to the event, although, when viewed in the light of after events, some might construe it as a good omen of his future holiness.

Francis was the eleventh of thirteen children in the Possenti family. There were four girls and nine boys. Three of the children died in infancy. The others lived to maturer years and attained to places of prominence in the walks of life they had chosen. They seem to have inherited from their father the gift of bringing all their enterprises to unusual success.

Signor Possenti was a jurist by profession. When not yet twenty-one, he completed the prescribed course in law at the University of Perugia, renowned since the fourteenth century for its school of jurisprudence. Within a year after his admission to the bar, the brilliance of his mental gifts and the integrity of his character brought him to the notice of Gregory XVI, who appointed him Governor of Urbania, which, at that time, was a district in the Papal States. So skilfully did he man-

age the affairs of the offices entrusted to him, that he was advanced to higher posts four times within a few years. He enjoyed the intimate friendship of such eminent personages as Mastai Ferretti and Joachim Pecci, who, even after they had ascended the pontifical throne as Pius IX, and Leo XIII, continued to honor him with their esteem and confidence. He was a man who regarded his public position as an inviolable trust, and was always ready to sacrifice his personal advantage to the common welfare. This spirit of disinterestedness was appreciated by his fellow citizens and, in conjunction with his compelling personality and natural leadership, it won for him their esteem and support, so that he became the controlling power in every movement that was inaugurated for civic progress.

Although his life was a very busy one, and his time preoccupied with the distracting duties of the highest official in the province, still, Signor Possenti was not forgetful that God and religion had stronger claims upon his service than any, or all, the affairs of state. He was accustomed to rise early every morning. Before quitting his apartment he would

spend an hour in prayer and pious reading, after which he would go to the cathedral to assist at holy Mass. He approached the sacraments frequently, and every evening he might be seen on his knees before the tabernacle praying to his Eucharistic King.

Most fathers are disposed to regard the mother as the chief instrument in the forming of their children's habits. It may be because she is more intimately associated with them, and because all their natural impulses seem to lead them to yield more readily to the mother's guidance than to the father's. Be this as it may, Signor Possenti was convinced that the mother's heart is the child's first and best school room and that of all works hers is the noblest, the most serious and the most enduring in its results. The genuine piety and Christian virtues of his wife left no room for doubt in his mind that he might well leave the training of his children to her. Though amiable and gentle by nature, nevertheless, she knew how to be firm and imperative when necessary. Thus she possessed the first requisites for the education of a child. She had come from one of the best families of the Marches, and had inherited not only a large

fortune, but also all the splendid womanly qualities which usually characterized the matrons of the older aristocracy of Italy. All this was especially re-assuring to her husband because the duties of his office frequently necessitated his absence from home for long intervals.

Whatever hopes and plans, however, he may have reposed in his good wife, he was doomed to see frustrated; for death claimed her four years after Francis' birth, and just when his children needed most a mother's care.

Finding himself thus bereaved of his beloved wife, and his large family of growing children deprived of their mother's fostering guidance, Signor Possenti was in no small quandary how to supply even inadequately, the place left vacant by her. In the midst of his anxiety, he was fortunate enough to discover a wise, prudent and responsible matron, Pacifica by name, who was willing to assume the management of his household. It was no easy task for her to undertake, but she seems to have been quite equal to it. She was not installed in her charge very long until she made the children realize that she was mis-

tress of the situation. They soon understood that, even though she did bear the mild and peaceful name of Pacifica, her hand was not unskilled in the use of the rod, and that she would brook no questioning of her authority in the domain over which she ruled. Yet, withal, the children grew to love and revere her almost as much as their own mother. In later years, when they had grown to maturity and jocosely recounted the events of those early days, and Pacifica's old-fashioned views about the correct method of rearing children, they always spoke of her in words of high esteem and entertained toward her only the kindliest feelings and the warmest gratitude.

The young Francis seems to have had the distinction of trying the patience of Pacifica and bringing upon himself her chastisements, more than any other member of the family. He was now a mischievous little fellow of five or six, and very unruly. His own sister declared, later on, that as a youngster he was the terror of the household. He was full of childish pranks and tricks, and it was the ordinary thing for Pacifica to have a long list of his juvenile misdemeanors to report to his father when he returned home after an ab-

sence in the neighboring cities. And it was equally common for Francis to be reproved and punished. Promises, of course, were exacted from him that he would mend his ways. But the reproofs and punishments seem to have availed but little, and the promises were scarcely made until they were broken; so that he became the occasion of no little worry and anxiety to his father, who, shaking his head ominously, would say to him: "I don't know what will become of you."

Certainly, his conduct at this time did not presage future sanctity. He possessed none of the characteristics of a saint—none, at least, that his father and Pacifica could recognize. Signor Possenti had read many a saint's life, but he could not recognize any resemblance between them and the manners of his Francis. He had read, for example, that such was the piety and devotion of St. Aloysius even in his earliest years, that he frequently hid himself away in corners where, after long search, he would be found at his prayers: and so amiable was his piety, and so heavenly his recollection, that he appeared to resemble an angel clothed with a human body: and that it was his practice, even at that early age, to recite daily the

office of Our Lady, and the seven penitential psalms. He had read also that St. John Berchmans never joined in the amusements of childhood; nothing of levity appeared in his conduct; and he never spoke but on edifying subjects. The Holy Ghost, who dwelt in his heart, as in a temple, regulated all its movements and shed such unction on his words that they touched the hardest and consoled the most afflicted hearts. He remembered, too, how St. Stanislaus Kotska, that other example of youthful holiness, at the early age of five or six, would conceal himself in some unused room and kneeling down, would fold his little hands and pray with such devotion that the tears would stream from his eyes; and that the servants, passing to and fro, often saw him so rapt in prayer that he was quite unconscious of any noise they might make around him. With these ideas of youthful sanctity in his mind, Signor Possenti would look at his boisterous and impetuous Francis and, observing how marked was the contrast, begin to fear that there was more of the little villain in him than of the incipient saint.

About this time, too, Francis began to mani-

fest signs of a stubborn and disobedient nature. Both kindness and punishment failed to curb it. When thwarted in his wilful caprices, he would frown and sulk and pout, and frequently burst into ungovernable fits of anger. When reprimanded by his father for these displays of passion, he would abruptly leave his presence, and give other evidences of his hot and unruly temper.

It would not be fair, however, to conclude that Francis was bad at heart or that he was entirely incorrigible and unsusceptible to the advice and admonitions given him. He was just a type of the ordinary, impetuous child whose unformed character was strongly asserting itself. Side by side with these bad traits, were indications of the good qualities that were in him.

An older brother who was the daily witness of his conduct tells us that, by nature, he was a very generous child and was ever ready to share with others anything he himself possessed. Thus, when a handsome gold watch-guard had been presented to him, on one of his birthdays, by a relative, and Francis saw that his brother admired it very much and was desirous of having it, he immediately gave it

to him. So, too, a beautiful silk scarf that was presented to him on another occasion, he gave to one of the housemaids, because he saw she was anxious to have it. The poor and needy, especially, appealed to his sympathies, and he would become annoyingly importunate in his pleadings with the somewhat parsimonious Pacifica for alms to distribute to them. When, sometimes, she refused, he did not hesitate to inform her that his father was the head of the house, and that it was his will that they should always be charitable. So delicate was his sense of honesty that nothing could induce him to appropriate to himself anything that belonged to another. He could not endure seeing another suffer unjustly, and he was always prepared to defend a weaker companion against the ridicule and small persecutions to which a stronger one might subject him.

He knew, too, how to defend himself. His brother attested that, more than once, even though but seven, Francis came home wearing unmistakable signs of having been in trouble somewhere in the streets of the city and that, even though he was the son of His Excellency, the Governor, he threw himself

enthusiastically into every sport and game, and the playground rang with his merry laughter and shouts of glee.

From all accounts he was a real, red-blooded boy, full of youthful mischief, but good and sincere at heart. He was little, if any, different from the average normal and healthy boy familiar to most of us. Doubtless the very fact—that he is presented to us not as one having been a saint from his cradle, but as a boy whose character showed how strongly the perverse tendencies of fallen nature were asserting themselves in him,—invests his after life with so much attractiveness, and makes it so inviting and encouraging.

It is the persuasion of most people who have had large experience with boys that, generally, those who are full of life—even with a little mischief in their blood and a spark of fire in their veins—are none the worse for it. Shakespeare may not have been entirely wrong when he wrote:

> They say best men are moulded out of faults,
> And for the most part become much more the better
> For being a little bad.

CHAPTER III

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE DAYS

OBSERVING the traits of character, both bad and good, that were asserting themselves in his young son, Signor Possenti saw the imperative necessity of introducing into his life, immediately, some force that would arrest the development of the one, and foster the growth of the other. His extensive and varied experience with every class and degree of men, had confirmed his own personal convictions that religion is the only power that can give the correct turn to anyone's life, and that the sooner its refining influence is brought to bear upon the child the better.

Accordingly, he had endeavored to impress the mind and heart of Francis by inculcating those practices and teachings of piety that are familiar to most God-fearing and Catholic parents. Prayer in common was a daily exercise in his household, and attendance at

the services of the Church was obligatory upon all. Notwithstanding his very busy life, he himself instructed his children in the doctrines of their faith as set forth in the catechism, and familiarized them with the life of Christ and of the saints. Francis grasped these simple teachings with such readiness and interest that, when he was only six years of age, the Archbishop gave him his first Holy Communion, and one year later conferred upon him the sacrament of Confirmation.

Now that the time had arrived when Francis' formal education should begin, his father was determined that, from the very foundation, it must be thoroughly Catholic. The erroneous notions about education without religion, so prevalent in these our own times, and working such deplorable and irretrievable havoc on the morals of so many youths, were not entirely unknown in the days of Signor Possenti. Not only had they made their appearance: they had also made alarming advances. Deceived by the sophistry of the statement that religion stunts the development of the mind and shackles the liberty of intellectual progress, not a few, especially in

the ranks of wealth and society, considered it smart and progressive to patronize the advocates of these pernicious views and to victimize their sons and daughters, with disastrous results. The discerning mind of Francis' father, however, was too keen and practical not to observe that the substitutes which an infidel philosophy offered instead of the teachings of religion, were a sham and a failure. He would have none of them for his boy. What availed it, thought he, if history made his son wise, and poetry imaginative, and mathematics keen, and literature versatile, and philosophy subtle, if he had not religion to make him moral.

It was at this time that Signor Possenti was promoted from the Governorship of Assisi to the post of Grand Assessor, or Judge of the Supreme Court of Spoleto. It was a position of the highest rank and responsibility, and its tenure was for life. It brought him into close acquaintance with the best people of the province, and thus he was able to select for Francis a tutor who would be entirely reliable and competent. It was the practice of the better families of those times, to entrust the primary education of their children to a pri-

vate teacher who, usually, took up his residence with the family and supervised the recreations, studies and conduct of the children. Accordingly, Signor Possenti engaged a certain Philip Fabri to superintend the schooling of Francis.

This young man was a cleric of exceptional discernment, prudence and tact. He possessed the gift, so frequently wanting in pedagogues, of grasping the peculiar psychology of his pupil's mind and temperament, and of adapting his method of instruction to meet its particular requirements. Hence it was not long until Francis began to develop surprisingly well under his direction. The boy's mind was naturally precocious and quick to learn. His talents were far above mediocre, and so it was easy for him to make rapid progress in his studies. But, best of all, his conduct steadily improved. His impetuosity and temper gradually became subdued, and the fickleness of his nature yielded to a soberness and resoluteness which delighted and comforted his anxious father.

Francis was now ten or eleven years of age. Satisfactory as were the results of Fabri's training, Signor Possenti thought it advisable,

nevertheless, to take his son from his tutorship, and place him at school with the Christian Brothers. These religious men were masters then, as they are now, in the art of Christian education, and were unsurpassed in their methods of developing the character of the youths who frequented their schools. Under their direction Francis continued to advance and improve. He became the leader of his class, and carried away many a trophy for excellence in his studies. He remained with the Brothers three or four years, during which time he completed the grades of the grammar school.

Francis was then sent to the college of the Jesuits at Spoleto. He continued there until he had finished the entire collegiate course. Throughout that period, he proved himself one of the ablest scholars in the college. His quick mind and tenacious memory enabled him to master his studies with a facility that sometimes surprised even his professors. He became so conversant with the Latin, Greek, Italian and French classics that he could repeat with ease long passages from memory. Because of his exceptional talents and the grace with which he usually mastered every

situation, he was selected to fill the more prominent and difficult rôles in the public academic celebrations of the college. At the conclusion of the course prescribed, the highest and most envied prize the college conferred, was bestowed upon him, namely, the gold medals of philosophy and honor. In those days when prizes were rare, such a distinction was hard earned and well deserved. His successes and the honors he attained, however, did not make him vain or self-conceited. He carried them with a grace and simplicity that elicited the friendliness rather than the chagrin of his less-gifted classmates.

One who was his chum at that time, describes him as having been very companionable and a general favorite with the college boys. He was always ready to join in games and sports. He was particularly fond of hunting and was the organizer of many an excursion for this purpose. His harmless jests and humorous stories provided general amusement at gatherings and recreations. He himself was often the object of the jokes and tricks of his companions. These he took good-naturedly, even when they inflicted pain and embarrassment. Sometimes, indeed, he

showed a little resentment, but he quickly recovered himself and resumed his cheerful disposition.

With the passing of the years from boyhood to youth, the peevishness, ill-humor and self-will which had evidenced themselves so prominently in his younger days, passed away too. But they were succeeded by other troublesome traits—more in accord indeed, with the spirit of youth just experiencing the first impulses of manhood, but none the less perilous. Francis was now at the precarious age of eighteen; the most decisive, perhaps, in the life of most men. The world was spreading out before him its pleasures and frivolities with all their alluring attractiveness; and he was gazing upon them with ever increasing delight. Little by little, he yielded to their seductions, until at last he found himself plunged into the giddy whirl of their excitement and diversion.

His father's position as the highest official of the province gave Francis entrè to the best families of Spoleto. Besides, he himself possessed an attractive personality which made him a welcome guest in every drawing room. He was talented, clever and witty. He was

also an accomplished musician, a graceful dancer and a delightful entertainer. Handsome in appearance, courtly in manners, his presence was much desired at the fashionable soirées of the aristocracy of the city. And he was equally eager to take part in these social functions. They appealed irresistibly to his vivacious imagination and artistic temperament.

The soirées were not merely gatherings of listless or blasé dilettanti who came together to chat over the latest scandal, or to fritter away time in idle conversation. Usually, they were assemblies of literary and professional people who met to discuss, in a familiar way, some scientific discovery, the merits of the latest book, or the most recent production of the stage or opera. Dancing, games and other amusements were commonly introduced, and thus many a delightful evening was passed.

Frequent and close contact with these people stimulated the ambition and enthusiasm of young Possenti. He emulated their manners, their speech, and even their attire. Mingling with the world, he would have it meet him at his best. And so he became quite punctilious about his dress and appearance.

The best clothes in the shops were none too good for him, and his tailor had many a despairing moment endeavoring to satisfy his exacting requirements of fit and fashion. Yet, with all this fastidiousness, there was no element of effeminacy in him. His refined sensibilities recoiled at the vulgarity of over dress, and his keen sense of manliness made him despise foppery and affectation. His bearing was that of a gentleman, and his impulses were always virile. No one could reproach him for any offence against the integrity, dignity and honor that constitute real manhood. Whatever small vanities he may have indulged, in dress and appearance, sprang from his desire to carry into the circles in which he moved, those refinements of the cultured gentleman which were expected and demanded by the society of those times.

The drama, too, and the opera had an inordinate attraction for him, and his face became familiar at the theatre and concert hall. He delighted in the light literature of the day, and was conversant with the latest novel. It was whispered, too, that he began to pay some attention to a charming *signorina,* which threatened to become a genuine *affaire du*

cœur. In short, he was well started in the ways of the world, and he bade fair to become one of its most ardent votaries. Like many other youths, he did not see the dangers lurking behind the glittering show of pleasure and amusement. From day to day he was beguiled along by some new attraction; and thus, almost unconsciously, he was disposing himself for a life of worldliness that ends so frequently in moral disaster. The power of pleasure is as subtle as it is binding, and once in its toils, escape is not easy.

Notwithstanding this levity and pleasure-seeking in which he indulged so freely, the morals of Francis remained untarnished. Not even the faintest suggestion of looseness or indelicacy ever appeared in his speech and manners. He was clean of mind, clean of heart, and clean of tongue; and the chastity of his soul and body was reflected in the frankness of his face, the clearness of his eye and the bloom of health upon his cheek. He scorned the coarse joke and the suggestive story which, too often, find their way into the conversation of young men of his age. Any liberty taken with that delicate modesty and reserve which seem natural instincts in the

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heart of Catholic youths, was rebuked by a flash of indignation from his dark eye, or by some reproving remark which immediately silenced the offender. A spirit clean and noble, as was his,—

"Is always pure, even while it errs,
As sunshine, broken in the rill,
Though turned astray, is sunshine still."

Nor did this life of gayety make him heedless of his religious duties. Prayer, attendance at holy Mass, confession and Communion, occasional visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and a tender devotion to Our Blessed Lady had their time and place in his life. And, doubtless, it was these safeguards that kept him morally clean and practically Catholic, while he walked in the midst of the valley of death, and mingled so freely with that world which St. John charged young men, so emphatically, not to love. With all his worldliness, the religious principles that had been instilled into his heart, both at home and at school, as part of his education, were exercising their influence over him, and were acting as a potent restraint upon inclinations

which, otherwise, might have disrupted his whole moral life.

But while the world was trying to bind Francis to its service, another power also was working within him. Silently, but powerfully, it was effecting its mysterious something in his soul,—something that was to surprise Francis himself and the world in which he moved.

CHAPTER IV

THE CALL OF GOD

ON THE very crest of his merry-making and social enjoyments, Francis was overtaken by a serious illness—so serious that death itself was imminent. Such an illness usually awakens its victim to an appreciation of the teachings of religion concerning time and eternity, and few are able to resist its chastening influence. It is one of God's favorite instruments by which he brings people to the realization of what it is that imparts to life its real worth and significance. The light of eternity streaming through the open portals of the tomb shows best the little value of the things of time, and enables one to get the correct perspective of life's real issues.

The effect upon Francis was sobering indeed. When he saw his young life about to be nipped in the bud, and his bright daydreams of a brilliant future ready to vanish

into the darkness of the grave, emotions he had never before experienced took possession of his soul, and awakened solemn thoughts in his impressionable mind. His conscience, too, now rebuked him for his levity and worldliness; for there is no time, perhaps, when conscience makes cowards of us all so much as when death is hovering near. The conviction was forced upon him that he had jeopardized the best interests of his soul in order to pursue the world's pathway of pleasures. And along with this conviction came also the resolution that, should his life be spared, he would repair the mistakes he had made.

With all the ardent impetuosity of his enthusiastic nature, he turned to God and prayed. And his prayer was sanctioned by a promise—a promise to break with the world entirely and to consecrate his life in some religious order. This was the first indication of the secret design which the Almighty was accomplishing within his soul. God heard his prayer and accepted his promise: health was restored to him almost immediately. But the promise he had made, he did not fulfil. That he made some attempt to keep it, appears

from the following letter addressed to him by a former Jesuit professor to whom he was greatly attached. From this letter it would seem that Francis had sought his advice about becoming a religious.

My dear Francis:—

Pax Christi! May the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. With these words I offer you the holiest salutation that can come from the heart of those who are devoted to one another in Christ. May that blessed peace be yours forever, a peace that can never come from the world, but from Jesus only: a peace that springs from His grace, and that brings with it heavenly light, in which you may see the vanity, fickleness and deceit of the things of this world; and wherein you may also see the preciousness of things eternal, the loving designs of Divine Providence upon you, and that will of God which you seek. This peace, however, you will never possess in the midst of the dissipation and pleasures of the world. It is found only in patience and humility, and in a prompt and glad obedience to those who are placed in authority over you. In this alone must you seek real content of heart, and here, too, will you discover God's

will in your regard, for He delights in peace. Remember, too, that this project you have in mind (the affair of your religious vocation), is a thing to be treated of more by prayers and tears before God, than by anything else. Place all your trust and confidence in Mary, and do not waver.

You ask for some little memento of me. You received several premiums from me when I was teaching you. Select whatever one of these you liked best, and keep it as a souvenir: and if, in return, you wish to do something very pleasing to me, cultivate the habit of recommending me daily to Jesus and Mary in your prayers.

My dear Francis, have courage. Ever keep in mind the thought of Jesus and Mary, and of the never-ending eternity to which we are approaching closer and closer still. And do not let these thoughts be barren and fruitless. Let them impel you strongly to conquer your faults, and to suffer willingly whatever pain must be necessarily experienced in such a combat. Let them make you hate your sins; let them make you shun dangerous company; let them make you despise all vanity in dress and conversation, and induce you to trample underfoot human respect and worldly manners and frivolities. Let them attract you to meditate upon the eternal

truths, and let them lead you frequently to the reception of the holy sacraments: in a word, let them persuade you to hate the world, its maxims, its aims and all that savors of its vanity.

Yours in Christ,
PETER TEDESCHINI, S.J.

Nothing more, however, came from Francis' resolution than this request for advice. Even the wise counsel given him by his friend in reply, produced little discernible effect upon him. With the departure of the serious illness that had threatened him, the sobering thoughts provoked by it departed also, and the promise he had made receded farther and farther into the distance until, at last, it became scarcely more than a hazy recollection. The world he had driven from him when death hovered near, he now permitted to approach closer still. And once more it spread out before him its thousand sparkling toys and with caressing voice, coaxed him to return to the enjoyment of them. At first, he trifled lightly with the temptation and then gradually succumbed to its seductive power. The glamor of the stage, the elegancies of the drawing room, the fascination of the opera,

the excitement of the dance, the romance of the novel, again became his delight; and it was not long until he was once more the gay and frivolous youth he had been before. Thus the weeks and months glided by, and with them Francis drifted ever farther from the monastic walls he had vowed to enter. Nevertheless, all the while, God was working out His plans within the young man's soul.

The means which He had used on the former occasion to check Francis's life of worldliness, and which had produced their effect only temporarily, God employed a second time. He afflicted him with another illness, and this time, death was even more imminent than the first. He was attacked by some disease of the throat which stubbornly refused to yield to the physician's treatment. One night when he was all alone, his throat became so congested and the pain was so acute that he feared he would choke. Already the clutches of death seemed to be pressing out his life breath by breath, and gasp by gasp. Filled with fright and consternation, he seized a picture of the Jesuit martyr, Blessed Andrew Bobola, which had been given him by one of his professors, and which was close

at hand. Hastily he clasped it to the convulsed throat and with all the earnestness of his soul, he besought God to deliver him from the hands of death, through the intercession of this heroic martyr. Then, like a ghost rising up from the grave, the memory of his unkept vow came forth to haunt him. In its presence his soul was penetrated with a humiliating sense of guilt and confusion: and his heart cried out in the bitterness of its remorse: "My God, have mercy on me and spare me this time, and I swear that my broken promise shall be fulfilled!"

Almost instantly, the pain and congestion ceased. He lapsed into a refreshing slumber and when he awoke the following morning, he found himself completely cured. Grateful and exultant with joy, because of this signal favor conferred upon him, Francis repaired the next day to the house of the Jesuit Fathers, and asked for an interview with the superior. He explained the circumstances of the vow he had made, and begged to be received into the Society.

The Father Provincial knew him well—knew the vanities and amusements in which he had been indulging. He was aware also

of his talents, and the integrity of his character; and, discerning man that he was, he perceived beneath the surface of his levity and fickleness, the material that could be moulded into a man of sterling worth and efficiency. He feigned great surprise, however, at Francis' request; and with a roguish twinkle in his eye and an enigmatic expression on his face, told him that he thought one of his tastes and habits more suited for the drawing rooms of fashionable society than for the cell of a secluded religious. The boy was much abashed at this remark and fearing that the Provincial was disposed to deny his petition, he repeated it with renewed earnestness and protested that it was his firm determination to abandon the frivolous life he had been living and to devote himself entirely to the service of God. Asking for a little time to weigh the matter, on the plea that the affair was too important to settle immediately, the Father Provincial dismissed him.

Some days later, Francis received a letter stating that it had been decided to accept him into the Society, and that he should prepare to enter the novitiate within a few weeks. He was overwhelmed with joy and straightway

took preliminary steps toward carrying out his plans.

But while waiting for the final summons, his fervor began to abate; and again the irresolution showed itself: when the day appointed for his entrance arrived, it found him unprepared to answer the call. He would wait just a little while longer. Thus, he procrastinated from day to day, uncertain and timid about taking the decisive step. It was not because he regretted having made the vow, or that he was hoping for some eventuality that would release him from its obligation. He was persuaded beyond all doubt that he had been divinely called to the religious state, and he fully intended to respond to the vocation; but not just now. He had communicated his intentions to no one but the Jesuit superior. To give no occasion for remarks or conjectures in his own family, or among his friends, as to the plans he was entertaining, he continued to participate in his customary pleasures and pastimes.

Twice God had called him, and twice he had delayed to answer. The third and last summons was now at hand. In the spring of 1856, the city of Spoleto fell a victim to the

dreadful epidemic of cholera. Ruthlessly and relentlessly, its contagion spread from house to house, and street to street, carrying terror and death and panic in its trail. There was scarcely a family that did not mourn the loss of a loved one. It did not spare even the home of the Grand Assessor; and Signor Possenti saw it steal through his doors and carry away his oldest daughter, the joy and pride of his household. The death of his sister affected Francis profoundly. She was his favorite and exercised greater influence over him than any other member of the family.

With characteristic faith, the terror-stricken people of Spoleto flocked to the great cathedral and gathered round the picture of their patronal Madonna, imploring her to intercede with her Divine Son to lift the terrible scourge.

This famous picture of Mary had been presented to the city by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1115. It had come down from an early century of Christianity, and had been preserved almost miraculously from the ravages of the Iconoclasts. It was held in the highest veneration by the faithful, and they were accustomed to turn to it in times of pri-

vate and public calamity. On this occasion they made a vow to Mary that, if she would obtain from her Divine Son the cessation of the devastating plague, the whole city would hold a solemn public procession in her honor.

The Madonna graciously heard their supplication. From the moment when, after the promise had been made, the saintly Archbishop from the balcony of the cathedral blessed the stricken city with the sacred image, not one death occurred; nor was one new case of the cholera reported. In a few days all traces of the epidemic disappeared, and soon the city cast off its signs of grief and terror and rejoiced in the happiness of having been delivered so speedily from the ravages of the pestilence.

In gratitude for this signal blessing, the citizens prepared to fulfill the solemn promise they had made. They selected the feast of Our Lady's Assumption for the great procession they had vowed.

The morning of the feast dawned bright and serene. From the adjacent hamlets and villages the peasants, dressed in their gala attire, flocked into the city in ever increasing numbers. The boom of cannon and the peal

of bells reverberated among the hills and re-echoed through the skies. The streets were gay with decorations and strains of joyous music filled the air. The road over which the procession was to pass was carpeted with sprigs of boxwood and evergreen, inlaid here and there with sacred emblems in colored leaves and fragrant flowers. Silken tapestries and rich damasks were hung from every window, and garlands of fresh blossoms were festooned from balcony to balcony, and house to house.

The great square in front of the church was thronged with the expectant populace as they awaited the procession. At last the great doors of the old cathedral, which was filled with worshippers, swung open and the procession issued forth. First came the acolytes with lighted tapers and swinging censers. Next followed the clergy clad in costly vestments; then Francis' father, Signor Possenti, representing the civil authority, and after him, the venerable Archbishop in his rich pontifical robes, carrying the sacred picture enshrined in a priceless frame of gold and jewels.

At the sight of the miraculous image, a

triumphant shout of joy and praise went up from thousands of throats; and the air became vibrant with the jubilant acclamation: *"Viva Maria, Viva Nostra Madonna!"* The clergy and people wended their way through the streets of the city and with cant of hymn and litany and canticle, poured out the gratitude of their souls to Mary, whose intercession had delivered them from the frightful scourge of cholera.

Francis was present at this memorable event. He, too, joined with the exultant crowd in paying grateful homage to the glorious patroness of Spoleto. As the sacred picture was carried past the spot where he was kneeling, his eyes met the eyes of the image. And then came the decisive moment of his life. To him the eyes of the Madonna seemed to be alive, and to peer into the deepest recesses of his heart. They caught his soul and held it by some mysterious force which he was powerless to resist. As he gazed, spell-bound, upon the face, the lips appeared to him to move, and a voice rang within his soul, a voice that was imperative in its tones: "Francis, why dost thou tarry in the world? Arise, make haste, and become a religious."

It lasted but a moment; but that moment held the destinies of his life. The procession moved slowly on, but Francis remained kneeling like one dazed or bewildered by some brilliant light suddenly flashed upon him. At length, recovering himself, he arose and returned to his home.

From that hour he was a changed boy. He was no longer the vain, fickle and worldly youth who had sallied forth that morning to join in the day's festivities. For the third time the summons of the King had come to him, and this time they came through the voice of the Queen.

All procrastination and wavering were ended now; Francis stood resolute and strong to obey the call without delay. His life's decision had been made—a decision whose full consequences will be known in eternity alone.

CHAPTER V

AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS FATHER

WHAT induced Francis Possenti to become a Passionist, rather than a Jesuit, as he had intended originally, we do not know. It may have been a secret part of the message delivered to him by the Madonna of Spoleto on the eventful day which we have described. Be that as it may, a letter was soon in the hands of the superior of the Passionist Fathers at Morrovale, begging him to admit Francis into the order. In due time, Francis received his answer informing him that his request had been granted, and that he should report at the house for novices at the earliest opportunity. Francis was overjoyed that the matter had been arranged so speedily and satisfactorily.

The duty of acquainting his father with the determination he had reached, was the next step to be taken.

Signor Possenti was then sixty-six years of

age and the sun of his life was far on its decline. Doubtless he had built many a cherished hope for his old age upon his favorite son. God had blessed him with a large family of thirteen children, and with an abundance of this world's goods. He had enjoyed continuous good health, unusual success and honorable position. Withal, the thought of the future occasioned some care and anxiety. He looked about him and saw that his family was gradually diminishing. Four of his children had been claimed by death; one had become a Dominican; another had just entered the seminary to prepare for the secular priesthood, and one daughter was residing with her husband in a far-distant city. Signor Possenti foresaw that, with his advanced years, he could not continue much longer the responsible duties of his office as Chief Magistrate of the province. Naturally enough, therefore, he had made some provisions for his declining years and he had based them mainly upon Francis, whose talents and personality singled him out from the rest of the children as the one best able to maintain the dignity of the family and continue its prestige.

In his admonitions and warnings to Francis

not to allow the world and its pleasure to take too strong a hold upon his life and ambitions, the father had told his son of the confidence he reposed in him, and how he relied chiefly upon him as the support and comfort of his old age. Consequently, Francis fully realized what keen disappointment his father would experience when he should learn that this son had decided to quit the world and relinquish all the bright prospects of success it promised him. Still, difficult as was the duty of making the announcement, it had to be done; and the sooner it was over with, the better.

So, summoning up all his courage and invoking the help of Mary, Francis presented himself to his father one evening and broke to him, as gently as he could, the decision he had made. At first, Signor Possenti was filled with blank amazement. He could not understand how his gay and pleasure-loving son could become a Passionist,—a member of one of the austerest religious communities in the Church. Surely, it must only be one of his passing fancies, so many of which he had already displayed. But when Francis explained how the miraculous Madonna had commanded him to quit the world and how

he had already completed all arrangements for entering the cloister, then his father understood that he was really in earnest and that it was not a mere caprice. Then, too, the full significance of the situation loomed up before him. His plans frustrated, his hopes blighted, his declining years saddened by the absence of his favorite son! It was too much. The sacrifice was too great. No, he could not consent to such a step!

Seeing the dismay he had occasioned his parent, Francis was deeply moved. Yet, he could not retreat from the position he had taken. Twice he had deferred answering the call of God, and now that he had been summoned for the third time, he dare not delay any longer. Wherefore, he redoubled his pleadings and with all the eloquence of his soul besought his father not to deny his request.

It was a touching scene—the father and son struggling with their emotions; the one feeling that, were he to consent, the comfort of his old age would be taken away; the other that, were the permission denied, he would be compelled to leave his father without his approval and blessing. After an interval of

tense silence, the father looked pathetically into the boy's eyes and Francis seemed to see some sign of yielding. The good old man, however, asked until the next day to ponder the affair, before reaching a decision. Francis retired from his presence, anxious and expectant of what the following day might bring.

Signor Possenti was a very sensible as well as a very religious man. When the first emotions from the shock he had received were subsided, the voice of his conscience made itself heard and the dictates of faith asserted themselves. He knew that his boy had been given him by God only as a trust, and that He could reclaim His gift at any time. Were he to thwart the designs of God, who knew but that it might revert upon his own head in sorrow and trouble a hundredfold? If the boy were hindered from following a vocation given under such singular circumstances, perhaps he might continue the life of worldliness to which he had been so much addicted, and follow in the path that leads inevitably to moral disaster and eternal ruin. The thought of his last years being haunted by a Nemesis so dreadful

filled his soul with terror and he trembled at the consequences that might result from placing himself as a barrier between God and his son.

Then too, the thought presented itself of the consolation that would come to his heart and of the glory that would crown his gray hairs because of the noble work his child could do for God and men. He was well acquainted with the life and work of the Passionists: how their time is apportioned to study and prayer and meditation and the preaching to the world of Christ and Him Crucified—that strange mystery of Christianity which St. Paul the Apostle called, "The wisdom of God, and the power of God."

Signor Possenti had attended more than one mission conducted by the Passionists. He had seen them appear in the pulpit clothed in their black, penitential habit, with the name of Jesus and His Passion inscribed in white letters over their heart. Standing beneath a large crucifix that was the inspiration of their eloquence, he had heard them inveigh against sin and religious indifference, and then plead tenderly with the sinner and the worldling to return to the riven feet of their Crucified

Saviour. He had seen how their thrilling appeals led the profligate to abandon his haunts of sin, the bandit to give up his crime and robbery, bitter enemies to lay aside their revenge, and even the atheist and infidel to return to belief in God and the practice of religion.

It was a Christlike work, indeed; and it was to this work that his Francis wished to give his life. The significance of this aspect of the situation appealed to him in all its grandeur and beauty. Gradually, he felt his soul influenced by some unseen power that compelled him to throw aside all selfish interests and to consent to give his son to a life so priestly and apostolic.

It had been a restless night for him as he struggled with the varying emotions that agitated his soul and pondered all the serious and conflicting thoughts that crowded his mind. But when morning dawned, the decision had been made and his mind and soul were at rest. Faith and conscience had triumphed over selfishness and parental love, and his boy would depart for Morrovale with his blessing and approval.

Francis, too, had passed a sleepless night.

To him it was a night of fervent prayer, for he was convinced that God's grace alone could prevail over his father's determination. It was a night, too, of suspense, lest the morning should bring an answer that would oblige him to do the most painful things of his life, —leave his home in opposition to his father's will.

When he appeared before his father the next day, it was with no little trepidation. But it was only for a moment or two. His first glance into his father's countenance told him the answer; it shone in the look of serenity on the venerable face and in the tender smile about the thin lips. "Yes, my son, you may go!" the father quietly replied to his eager questioning.

The joy of that moment was overwhelming to Francis' soul. He threw himself into his father's arms, and tried to tell him the gratitude that welled up from his heart. The joy and satisfaction of those minutes were mutual, were as delightful and consoling to both father and son, as the moments of the night before had been tense and sad. Never before had that parent and child felt bound by ties of affection so close; and never had they ex-

perienced such happiness as that which now flooded their souls as they looked up to heaven and saw it smile upon the sacrifice of the one and the heroism of the other.

Francis was just completing the last days of his life at college. A few days more and the commencement exercises would be held. At that time the school vacation in Italy came during September and October. Francis busied himself preparing for his departure from home as well as for the collegiate exercises, in which he had been selected to take the principal part.

He would have preferred, indeed, to escape the excitement of that event, and the notoriety that was sure to come to the student who filled the prominent part. He felt, however, that it would be ungracious to decline the part at the last minute; and that it might be cowardly to run away from a situation displeasing to him. Therefore, he decided to go through with it, even though it meant that he must disguise the real sentiments of his heart and appear before the audience with his secret locked up within his soul.

CHAPTER VI

FAREWELL TO THE WORLD

IT WAS a brilliant assemblage. The spacious auditorium of the Jesuit College was filled with the parents, friends and relatives of the young men who were to go forth that night from their Alma Mater. The patrons, too, of the college were there, and the clergy, and the aristocracy, for this institution was the centre of education in Spoleto, and the annual commencement was an event which interested the whole city. In the place of honor sat the Apostolic Delegate, and at either side, the Archbishop and the Grand Assessor, Signor Possenti.

Francis had been chosen valedictorian of his class and well, indeed, had he prepared himself for this his final effort before his friends. Never before had he appeared so handsome, and never before had he seemed so faultlessly attired. He had overlooked nothing that could lend grace and elegance

to his presence on this occasion. He stood, erect and alert, before the audience, his dark eyes brilliant with the secret fire glowing within his soul. Could he have spoken the real sentiments that throbbed in his breast at that time, he would have told the world how much he scorned it; how he despised its shoddy pretense, and what a fool he had been to allow himself to be tricked so long by its deceptions. But he was there that night to act a part, and he would wear the disguise until the end.

He had studied his oration in all its details, for on that night, of all others, he wanted to do his very best. And his desires were not disappointed. A new life seemed to thrill in his veins, imparting some strange power that made him surpass his most hopeful expectations. When he had finished, the hall rang with the plaudits of the large assembly. The Apostolic Delegate arose and congratulated him on his splendid effort, and then decorated him with the gold medals for philosophy and general excellence—the two most coveted prizes the college bestowed.

It was, indeed, a night of triumph for Francis Possenti; and everyone deemed him the

proudest and the happiest boy in all Spoleto. He himself felt the spirit of the occasion and he was exuberant with joy, but it was a joy quite different from that imagined by his friends. He had accomplished what he had set out to do. He had tricked that world which had tricked him, and tricked it, moreover, at its own game. The bows and smiles with which he received the praises and congratulations lavished upon him were, really, the bows with which he bade the world farewell, and the smiles with which he scoffed at its empty follies.

The ceremonies of the evening over, he returned home with his father. It may not be entirely imaginary to picture him, when he had retired to the seclusion of his room, as he paused before the large mirror and looked at himself attired for the last time as a votary of the social world, and then going to the window, gazed upon the gay city with its dim lights, and winding streets, alive with the crowds of laughing and chattering people returning from the college celebration. We can see his eyes resting upon the theatre and the opera he had frequented, on the splendid homes that had welcomed him to their draw-

ing rooms and the shops that had furnished him with the latest styles and fashions. These, too, he was looking upon for the last time; and as he did so, we may fancy the cynical smile that played about his lips as he shook his head disdainfully and muttered: "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity. Happy the man who wants none of it, for he is the world's master, and everyone else is its slave."

No beggar ever cast off his sordid rags with greater delight than did Francis Possenti put away the elegant attire in which he had arrayed himself that evening to act the final scene in the drama of his worldly career. With peaceful mind and joyful heart, he closed his eyes and slept the sleep and dreamed the dreams of one who has conquered a conquering world.

The city, too, went to sleep that night. The hundreds who had thronged the college auditorium and witnessed the triumph of young Possenti never suspected the part he had acted before their very eyes. When they awoke the next morning, they were amazed to hear the report that was spreading rapidly from house to house. Francis Possenti, the hero and the idol of the preceding night had left his home.

For while the first rays of the morning sun were gilding the dome and turrets of the cathedral, and the city was stirring to the monotony of its daily life, he was on his way to the Passionist novitiate at Morrovale.

CHAPTER VII

FROM HOME TO THE CLOISTER

MORROVALE is situated some eighty-five or ninety miles northeast of Spoleto. In those days it was reached by stage over the high road that led through Loretto, the city made famous throughout Christendom by the pious tradition of six centuries, that the Santa Casa, or Holy House of Nazareth, in which Christ became incarnate, had been transported thither by angels so that it might escape desecration at the hands of the Turks. No Christian shrine in all the western world is more highly esteemed, and none more rich in precious votive offerings made by the faith and love of the countless pilgrims who have journeyed there to venerate the spot where Mary became the Mother of God. A deep furrow, worn by the knees of the pilgrims, in the hard marble around the sanctuary, is an enduring witness to the millions who, during six hundred

years, have come to worship at the place where "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

A spot so hallowed by sacred memories, and so dear to Catholic hearts, was sure to appeal to the faith and devotion now aflame in the soul of Francis Possenti. Wherefore, he interrupted his journey at Loretto and tarried there for two days. He arrived on the seventh of September, the vigil of the feast of Our Lady's Nativity. Thousands of pilgrims had flocked from every quarter to celebrate the feast, and among them were several prelates and princes of the Church.

Francis had witnessed many wonderful manifestations of tender love for Mary in his own city of Spoleto, where her miraculous image was so piously venerated, but never had he seen any that equalled the outpouring of faith and devotion he beheld here. From early dawn until mid-day, Masses were celebrated continuously in the sacred shrine, and thousands of pilgrims received Holy Communion. The walls of the Holy House were covered with their devout kisses, its floor was bedewed with their tears, and all day long the basilica resounded with hymns, prayers and

litanies as their hearts overflowed with love and gratitude to Mary and her Divine Son.

Francis' own soul was awed by the sanctity of the place. In worshipful silence he pondered the significance of the mystery of the Incarnation and as the realization of God's infinite condescension in becoming man, grew upon him, he became more and more confused with the sense of his own selfishness in having delayed so long to sacrifice the poor pleasures of the world for the sake of God. With deep contrition he made a general confession of his whole life, and received Holy Communion with extraordinary fervor. It was a day rich in blessing for him, and his soul rejoiced in the graces he had received. The happiness of the day, however, was not to go by unmarred. A severe test of his vocation awaited him.

The Vicar of Loretto was a close friend of the Possenti family, and Francis carried letters to him from his father. The old priest welcomed him with every sign of delight. But when he learned that Francis had left his father's house and all the bright prospects which the future held out to him, in order to enter the Passionist novitiate, he frowned and

showed marks of displeasure. Forthwith he proceeded to tell him what he thought of such an adventure. He was determined that the genuineness of the young man's vocation should be thoroughly proved, and he himself would apply the test.

Accordingly, he subjected Francis to a grilling examination in which he enquired minutely into the events leading up to this step and the motives that prompted it. He portrayed very vividly the rigorous and austere life of the Passionists.

"I can speak from personal experience," he said, "because when I was a young man about your age, "I, too, entertained ideas similar to yours and became a Passionist novice. And let me tell you, I found it something quite different from what I anticipated. It was not long until I discovered that it was most difficult for me to live such a life; and so I was compelled to abandon it. The poetry and romance of the life of prayer and solitude and penance practised by the Passionists will vanish after a few days, and then you will be brought face to face with the cold, stern facts of their severe rule which imposes almost continual mortification and self-denial. The

hard bed and midnight prayers, the coarse food and rough habit, the long fasts and quiet solitude will soon dispel this fancy that has bewitched you, and you will be very glad to return to the comforts and amusements to which you have been accustomed. And then, you will have to submit to the embarrassment occasioned by your coming back home, and to the taunts and railleries of your friends who will tease you for your abortive piety."

Continuing his remonstrances, the Vicar urged Francis to abandon his project and immediately to retrace his steps to Spoleto. Francis listened attentively and respectfully to the priest's words, and when he had finished, simply said:

"Father, I have thought long and often of all that you have just told me, and I have weighed it well. I am convinced that God has summoned me to this manner of life, and I have no alternative but to obey. He who has given me this vocation will also give me the strength to live the life it demands. My mind is set. I assure you, at this time tomorrow, I shall be at Morrovale."

Again, the priest peered searchingly into his eyes, and seeing in them the sincerity and

determination of his soul, replied: "My son, I have been only trying you, and you have stood the test. Depart in God's name, and answer the call he has given you."

The following day, Francis resumed his journey toward Morrovale. He reached the monastery gate just as the sun was setting behind the verdant hills, and the silver notes of the evening *Ave* were floating on the quiet air.

The convent was small and unpretentious, with white walls, and a low, red roof surmounted by a modest belfry almost hidden from view by the tall trees. He pulled the rope at the portal, and there was solemnity in the very tones of the bell as they re-echoed through the cloister walls. Soon the heavy doors opened, and the brother porter ushered him into the small, unadorned reception room. As the great door closed behind him, Francis felt that they were shutting out forever from his life the world with its vanities and sins. Presently, he heard the patter of sandalled feet on the tessellated corridor outside; and a moment later he saw, standing in the doorway, the figure of a black-robed

monk, who greeted him with a cheery voice and bade him a hearty welcome.

It was Father Norbet: he who was to play so important a part in the future life of this young man. He was rather short in stature, and slender almost to emaciation. His eyes were dark and keen and penetrating and his features well defined, as if carved from ivory. His whole appearance was that of an ascetic. The austerity of his presence, however, was relieved by a tender and sensitive mouth and the smile that lingered about his lips made one feel that one was in the company of a sympathetic friend. There seemed to hover around him a mysterious something that made one sense the supernatural, as though one were near to a man who had been close to Christ and had caught His spirit of meekness and gentleness.

Alone with Father Norbert in the quiet of the little room, Francis recounted the story of his vocation. He told how he had dallied with this choice grace of God until, at last, the miraculous image of Spoleto spoke to him and conquered his cowardice and inconstancy. He told, too, of the disgust he now felt for the world and all it had to give, and how his

one desire was to serve God in the peace and quiet of the religious state.

The priest listened with interest to the outpouring of his young heart. He admired the simplicity and earnestness of his soul. Immediately, he recognized in him an exceptional character and he was convinced that God had some very special designs upon him.

When Francis had finished his story, Father Norbert encouraged and comforted him with the tenderness of a mother and instinctively, the boy felt he had found a master and a friend who would tutor him in the life he had elected to follow. Those moments of their first meeting were very impressive and were the beginning of an intimacy that led to results which no one then would have anticipated.

A little later, Francis was shown to his cell. It was a narrow room, simple, neat and very poor. A table and two chairs of common wood, a bed with a straw mattress and pillow, a crucifix and three or four sacred prints were its only furnishings. It was in striking contrast with the comfortable and elegant quarters he had occupied in his father's palace at Spoleto.

The scene, too, from the window of his cell was in strange contrast with what his eyes had beheld a few nights before when he had stood at the window of his room in Spoleto looking upon the gay city whose pleasures had held him so long. Now, below him lay the dark garden, with its shrubbery and fruit trees. Above, was the clear, purple sky, with the moon and stars shining with a soft brilliancy. Beyond stretched the fields and meadow-land, dotted here and there with thatched sheds, used for sheltering the sheep and cattle.

The majestic silence and the holy calm of the scene must have seized and held his soul. The very atmosphere seemed pervaded with something unearthly and divine. He could see the rough narrow road which he had just traversed, winding off into the distance; and perhaps it carried his thoughts back to Spoleto with its pleasures and merriment; and a voice may have whispered in his ears, "Are you quite sure that you have not made a mistake in abandoning a life of ease and enjoyment, for this place of prayer and penance?"

Only for a moment, however, could his mind have harbored the thought. He felt that he was now in a safe haven, far from the

selfishness, the turmoil and the dissipation that had threatened him with ruin; and the words of the Psalmists, which he had heard the Canons sing so often in the choir stalls of the dim, old cathedral at Spoleto, may have come to his mind with a new significance: "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners. I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwelleth. Here shall I dwell, because I have chosen it."

When he knelt beside the little white bed and prayed, it is not assuming too much to say that a spirit of joyous content possessed him, and assured him that he had chosen the better part, and that here his life's noblest aims would be realized.

In the dead of the night, he was awakened with a sudden start. It was the matin bell summoning the religious at the midnight hour to arise and sing the praises of God. A few minutes later there broke upon his ear the sound of the deep, sonorous voices of the monks, as they stood in the distant chapel, chanting verse after verse of the sacred

psalmody. For more than an hour the solemn rhythm of the chant echoed through the cloister walls, and out over the silent fields, and up into the purple sky. Francis listened to it with a kind of fascination. It seemed to transport him into another world, a world of spiritual presences which pressed close upon him on every side.

When he awoke again, a faint ray of yellow light was upon his face and couch. The sun was rising in the heavens, where the silvery rays of early dawn were being transformed into a tissue of crimson and gold. It was morning, and Francis Possenti had passed his first night in the Passionist novitiate at Morrovale.

CHAPTER VIII

CLOTHING WITH THE RELIGIOUS HABIT

IT WAS the afternoon of the twenty-first of September, 1856, and the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. The little chapel of the novitiate at Morrovale was filled with the simple and curious peasants who had gathered from the country sides to see the distinguished son of the Grand Assessor of Spoleto take the sombre and penitential habit of the Passionists.

The ceremony was solemn and impressive. Slowly the religious filed into the sanctuary and took their places in the chancel stalls. Father Norbert, clad in the sacred vestments, stood at the altar as the youthful novice approached with steady step and face radiant with the joy that filled his soul. It was apparent from Francis' manner that he realized the full significance of the sacrifice he was about to make and that he was prepared to make it with whole-hearted generosity.

Francis prostrated himself before the altar, and Father Norbert chanted the following prayer:

"O Omnipotent and Eternal God, who in Thine ineffable love and in the abundance of Thy mercy, didst deign to restore the fallen world through the death of Thy only begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, that we might be freed from everlasting death, and brought to the joys of paradise; look kindly upon this Thy servant Francis, who with sincere mind desires to follow Thee alone in this place consecrated to Thy praise, so that withdrawn by Thy help from harmful temptation, he may walk in the way of Thy commandments. Give unto him whom Thou hast separated from the vanities of the world, the protection of Thy help that no temptation may dissuade him from his purpose, through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Then, with incense and holy water, the priest blessed the religious habit with which the novice was to be clothed. Turning to Francis, who was still prostrate before the altar, he bade him arise and addressed him in the words of St. Paul: "May the Lord divest thee of the old man of sin with his works, that

thou mayest put on Christ Jesus and Him Crucified."

The coarse, black garb was then thrown over him, and a leathern girdle fastened around his waist. A long flowing mantle that fell in loose folds from his shoulders was next put upon him, and rough sandals replaced his shoes. Thus he was clothed in the religious dress which, henceforth, was to be his attire until the end of his life.

A large, black, wooden cross was now placed upon his shoulder as the priest said: "Receive, dearest brother, this cross in memory of the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Deny thyself under the mighty hand of God, that thou mayest have part with Him in life everlasting." Then taking a crown of thorns, Father Norbert pressed it upon his head, saying: "Receive, beloved brother, this crown of thorns, in memory of the thorny crown of Christ, Our Lord. Humble thyself under the mighty hand of God, and for His sake be subject to every creature."

Nothing could express more accurately than this ceremony, the life of self-denial and unworldliness which Francis Possenti was to live for the future. Henceforth, Christ and

Him Crucified was to be the inspiration of his life, the model of his conduct, and the sole object of his affections. The rough, woolen tunic symbolized the penance; the cross, the self-sacrifice; and the thorns, the submissive obedience; these were to be the controlling forces of all his thoughts and activities. For the gilded drawing room in which he had spent so many happy hours, he would now have a poor and narrow cell; for the bright and gay theatre which had so often fascinated his eyes and charmed his fancy, he would now kneel in the quiet chapel and hold prayerful vigils with its sainted images; for the frivolous novel that had delighted his mind, he would now read the breviary and the lives of austere saints; and for the merry dance, his sandalled feet would pace the long and dim corridors of the holy cloister.

Not, indeed, that joy and happiness were to be banished entirely from his life, and that gloom and melancholy and cheerlessness were to be his portion instead. The religious state was not established to drive away the gladness of life, but only to consecrate it. It is a state, indeed, which the worldling will sneer at, and call madness: a state he can never understand,

for the folly of the Cross always has been, and always will be, a scandal to the world. The exchange which this brilliant and handsome young man made that day would be deemed by the world's votaries as a sin against society and the interests of humanity: a sin for which they would have no patience and which nothing could condone; for, to all appearances, the world he was renouncing was one in which he would have triumphed and not one in which he would have failed. It might be tolerated in the ignorant, oriental fakir, or the benighted ascetic of the Dark Ages, but it was stupid in an intelligent youth of the enlightened nineteenth century. It meant the stunting of his individuality, the retrenchment of every natural and legitimate impulse of his soul, the delivering himself over to a living death; and so, they would condemn him indignantly and mutter hard things against the Church that fostered such nonsense and fanaticism.

To this young man, however, who had made the exchange and whose mind had been illuminated with the supernatural light of God's truth, one hour of the divine folly of the Cross was worth more than all the cen-

turies of the world's sham wisdom: the exchange he made that day was the exchange of time for eternity. It was a transaction that brought truer joy and purer happiness than all the world's glittering show and riotous pleasure.

The greatest happiness of life consists in the realization of one's ideals. And the higher the ideal, the higher will be the happiness that comes from its realization. Christ and his blessed teachings are, and always will be, the sublimest ideals of beauty and goodness to which men may aspire. And he who reproduces Christ and his maxims in his own life, realizes in himself the noblest ideals and thus introduces into his life the truest happiness, a happiness that is purely spiritual and a reflex of heaven itself. And they who elect to follow Christ in this way, show the refinement of their natures and the exaltedness of their ambitions; for the finer one's nature is, the finer will be the objects on which one centres one's heart and mind. Thus Francis' choice, made that day, reveals an angle of his character which, even from a purely human standpoint, calls for admiration.

As he knelt there in the soft light streaming

through the chapel windows, attired in his religious garb, with the cross and thorns upon him, he was a picture for a master's brush. There was upon his face that expression of glorious joy which the classic painters of old tried to put into the faces of worshipers whom they portrayed kneeling before Christ, pouring out their hearts in speechless love. Already the light of another world seemed to be illumining his features. He had come into the garden of God, and the spell of its loveliness was upon him, holding his soul in rapture, and flooding it with a nameless joy and peace.

The sentiments that stirred his soul at that moment may be gathered from the following letter addressed to his father, when he retired to his cell after the ceremony of that afternoon.

MORROVALE,
Sept. 21, 1856

My dearest Father:

At last the great day has come. For a long time the Almighty called me and, ungratefully, I remained deaf to His voice, by continuing to amuse myself with the world's puerile toys: but notwithstanding this, His infinite mercy has wisely carried

out His design, and today, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, I received with ineffable joy, the religious habit and took the name of Confrater Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows.*

Until this very moment, dear father, I have experienced nothing that could occasion me the slightest dissatisfaction with the religious state or my vocation. Be assured that whomsoever God calls to the religious life receives a favor so great that words cannot express its value, for to live a good Christian life in the world requires the utmost caution and vigilance.

I ask your pardon, dear father, for all the disobedience and displeasure I may have shown you, and I ask the same of my brothers and good Pacifica. It is in no spirit of ostentation that I do this. God sees my heart.

Say to my brothers, from me, that they must not annoy you, dear father, for you do not deserve it, and that they must love one another. Tell Michael, especially, to fly from evil companions, who are our eternal ruin. I know very well how many sins they can occasion.

* The members of the Passionist Order drop their family name and assume the name of a saint instead. The word *Confrater* is used to distinguish the clerics who are preparing for the priesthood from the lay brothers who are called *Frater,* or Brother.

I do not mean to preach, for I need it myself more than anyone else. Pray for me and ask others to pray for me, and I shall not fail to remember you.

Asking your blessing, dear father,

I am your affectionate son,

CONFRATER GABRIEL of our Lady of Sorrows.

And now we say farewell to *Francis Possenti.* Henceforth he will be known to us as *Confrater Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows,* the name given to him on the day when he cast off the world, and put on the livery of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER IX

THE NOVICE

THE contrast between Confrater Gabriel, the Passionist novice of Morrovale, and Francis Possenti, the gay gallant of Spoleto, was never so marked as when he stood in the scullery of the monastery, washing the dishes after the noon-day meal.

As we look upon him standing there, wearing an old, patched apron, and his arms bared to the elbows, it is difficult to identify him with the fastidious and elegantly groomed worlding whose acquaintance we made in the preceding chapters. An occupation, usually so distasteful even to the professional kitchen maid, seemed a very agreeable one to this scion of a wealthy and distinguished family, who had been accustomed to all the luxuries of a Governor's palace. There was a smile of satisfaction upon his face, and a gleam of happiness in his eyes, as he gave himself to it,

as gracefully as he had joined in the brilliant soirées of fashionable society just a few weeks before. That look of serenity and satisfaction was, moreover, the external expression of the new spirit which had taken possession of him, and which was dominating his soul and all its activities. It was a spirit of unworldliness, humility and self-denial: a spirit rigorously and invariably required of every one who aspires to become a close follower of the Crucified.

Worldliness had been the characteristic of Gabriel during his gay, pleasure-loving and pleasure-seeking life at Spoleto; and had he not been snatched from its influence by a special grace, certainly, his whole moral life would have been wrecked. With the grace of his vocation to the religious life, came the keen realization of the peril he had escaped, and also the resolute determination to erase from his heart even the faintest vestige of the destructive spirit that had actuated him.

His intimate association with the world and worldlings had taught him that self-aggrandizement, self-exaltation and self-reliance are the sum of their creed of morality; and hardly had the great oaken doors of the novitiate

closed upon him, than he set himself to establish in his heart self-denial, self-abasement and diffidence, which are the compendium of the religion of Christ.

The determination of his soul was so indomitable and the vigor of his efforts so persistent and irresistible that, in a remarkably short time, he accomplished the purpose to which he had set himself. As Father Norbert declared: "Such was his hunger and thirst for all virtues, such the assiduity with which he labored to acquire them, that he never lost an opportunity for practising them."

St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, ordained in his constitutions that those who seek membership in his Congregation, must be proved in the practice of humility.

> "Let them wash the dishes," he said, "serve in the kitchen, sweep the house, and give other proofs of Christian submission and patience. For this end, they shall perform humiliating and mortifying works ordered by the superiors, from which it may be clearly known whether they have a real love of being despised; whether they be dead to themselves and the world in order

to live to God only, in God, and through God, willingly hiding their life in Jesus Christ who, for our sakes, chose to become the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people, giving the most faultless example of all virtues."

From first to last, this saint insisted that his subjects be actuated always by the lowliness of Him who humbled Himself even to the death of the cross; and the burden of all his admonitions to them was: "Know that one grain of pride suffices to overthrow a mountain of holiness. God reveals his sublime secrets only to those who are humble of heart. Therefore, entertain a sincere contempt of yourself; let it be your greatest desire to be regarded as an object worthy of contempt."

Taking these injunctions of the sainted founder as the guiding principles of his conduct, Gabriel set himself immediately to conform both his inner and his outer life with them, not only conscientiously, but also enthusiastically.

First, he meditated upon the significance and the necessity of these basic teachings of the spiritual life, until every fibre of his moral sense became permeated with the con-

viction that he must surrender himself without reserve to their empire, if he would realize in his life the holiness to which he felt himself so vehemently impelled.

Then, fearing his own impulses and suspecting his own desires, he flung aside all thought of self and fell, trembling and kneeling, at the feet of the Almighty, in diffidence, self-denial and self-abasement. He never wearied thinking and saying that: "Grace yields its choicest fruits only in those who profoundly believe in their own weakness, and in the divine power of God that glorifies itself through their weakness."

He wrote in his note book at this time: "The secret of all religious success lies in the conviction that we are but dust, and that God alone can raise us up from the dust and sustain our efforts. In acknowledging oneself to be a fool, one becomes wise with the wisdom of God, and is elevated to a throne of spiritual power."

The effort to direct his life in accordance with these convictions of his mind was not always an easy one. There were times in those first days of his novitiate, when the remnants of his former pride and vanity as-

serted themselves unmistakably, and when the smouldering fire of his hot temper flared up and broke out in quick flashes from his dark eyes; and when he showed, in many other ways, that the perverse impulses of his nature were not yet entirely under control. There were times, too, when his delicate sensibilities winced under the severities of the austere life he was following; and when the long hours of prayer, solitude and silence became irksome and repugnant to his vivacious and sanguine temperament. Still, withal, gradually, he was gaining the mastery over himself, and he spared no effort to make the conquest complete and permanent.

The very faults into which he lapsed betimes, he made stepping stones toward the goal of perfection for which he yearned. He punished himself for them, and made them the occasion for greater self-humiliation. Frequently, he persuaded his director to permit him to make public acknowledgment of his failings in the refectory before all the religious; and this not in the general and formal way in which the chapter of faults is made in some religious communities, but in particular, specifying in detail the faults of

which he felt himself guilty. It was an edifying sight to see him thus upon his knees, with a cross upon his shoulders and his head bowed in humility, while he implored the prayers and forgiveness of his brethren for the imperfections he had committed.

Father Norbert, too, helped his young disciple to put into practice the self-denial and lowliness he experienced within his soul. Studiously, but prudently, he thwarted the novice's plans, opposed his views, criticized his work, placed him in trying positions, mortified him before his companions, required him to do things utterly unreasonable, blamed him for things of which he was entirely innocent; and in a thousand other ways subjected him to tests of obedience and humility that proved indubitably the sincerity of his interior dispositions. Indeed, the methods Father Norbert sometimes employed seemed almost heartless, but the wise priest knew the timber of the disciple upon whom he was working, and was confident that the young man's strength was equal to the strain.

Only they who realize that human nature can be regenerated by a process which Christ called crucifixion, can understand, not only

that Father Norbert's methods were correct but also that they were the only effectual means he could have employed to establish on a firm and enduring basis, in Gabriel's heart, those essential virtues of which the cross of Christ is at once the expressive symbol and the energizing power. Father Norbert knew that the mere intellectual appreciation of the beauty and power of Christ's life and teaching, and the mere comprehension of the principles that should actuate a life of exalted sanctity, are not enough to produce evangelical holiness. He understood that those principles, and that knowledge, must be concreted into action by the habitual exercise of acts conforming with them: that then, and then only, may it be clearly known whether one has a real love of being despised, and whether one be dead to oneself and the world, and able to say with the Apostle: "I am crucified to the world, and the world to me": which words, when all is said and done, are the only adequate expression of a life truly conformed to Christ and His blessed teaching. Therefore he required from his disciple tangible acts that proved the genuineness of the spirit working within him.

So courageously did Gabriel sustain these tests, and so generously did he yield himself to the impulses and inspirations of divine grace, that Father Norbert could make the following declaration:

"Concerning his life as a novice, I can assert unhesitatingly that, having entered the religious state with the firm purpose of delivering himself over entirely to the service of God, he evidenced from the very beginning, that all his energies were directed to realizing this determination. With the utmost simplicity he began to practise all the exercises of his new life, and he did so with such exactitude and regularity that, after a short while, those who observed him might be led to think he had spent many years in the monastic life. And this, too, notwithstanding the fact that his new life was in such direct opposition to the gay and worldly life he had pursued prior to his coming to the monastery.

"There were many little things, indeed, in his conduct about which he had to be admonished, and which called for correction, but I do not remember that he ever gave me really occasion to reprimand or punish him. He seemed to be ever on the alert, so that the enemy of his soul could not take him by surprise, or unwarily entrap him

into any deliberate fault. And withal, there was nothing singular about him. His external conduct differed little from that of the other novices: but his interior sentiments and emotions were so ardent and impelling, that he soon far surpassed them all in the fervor and generosity with which he discharged every duty.

"During this period of his novitiate, one could see the beginning of all those virtues which he developed and perfected to so eminent a degree, in the few years that followed. From the very outstart, he engaged to die to himself, and to mortify his perverse inclinations; and so well did he succeed that I do not recall that he ever yielded to any passion with full advertence.

"All this becomes the more significant and admirable, when it is considered that nature had endowed him with talents and accomplishments which, from the human viewpoint, seemed more adapted to a worldly career than to one hidden with Christ in the solitude and obscurity of the cloister. Handsome in appearance, he possessed also that gentle grace of dignity of manner which magnetizes those who come within the radius of its influence. Lively and jovial by disposition, his companionship was a delight to all. Witty and ready of

speech, his conversation always afforded pleasure, and the versatility and resourcefulness of his mind and imagination easily provided topics for discussion both interesting and entertaining. His heart was very tender and affectionate, and went out in sympathy to all who were afflicted and distressed. He had also a remarkable facility for winning the confidence of others, and in showing deep interest in affairs that were of concern to them. He was open, frank and candid; and a relentless enemy to duplicity, hypocrisy and deceit. Any one who once came into contact with him, felt the desire to meet him again, and to enjoy his friendship.

"Yet these very gifts which, usually, are such powerful and enviable assets in the worldling, Gabriel turned to his own spiritual advantage. The liveliness of his temperament was used by him to beguile himself along cheerfully, when aridity and depression of spirit cast their gloom over him, and shut out the joy that comes from sensible devotion and fervor. The grace and dignity of his manner helped to keep his soul serene and composed; and the magnetism of his personality was directed to drawing others to piety and love for Jesus and Mary. His facility of speech, and charm of conversation enabled him to talk

of God and holy things with an unction and persuasiveness that was irresistible: and the affectionateness of his heart was a great help to enable him to love God most ardently and supremely.

"Many, indeed, and severe were the onslaughts he had to encounter with the infernal enemy who attacked him in his efforts to acquire virtue. Sometimes, the tempter would thrust before him his horrible suggestions openly and boldly; and then again, he would cunningly disguise them with a mask of apparent goodness whose speciousness was most deceptive. So fierce, at times, was the struggle that Gabriel, almost exhausted, would run to me for assistance, and it seemed to me that the evil one had let loose upon him all the powers of hell. However, he was always master of himself, and the enemy could never break through the fortifications of his soul. With great candor and simplicity, he manifested his whole interior to me, and with the utmost docility followed my counsels and suggestions. Thus God's grace enabled him to come off victorious in every assault, so that during all the time he was under my direction, he did not have to accuse himself of any deliberate breach of rule, or any failing against the practices of the religious life."

One of Gabriel's fellow novices made the following statement:

"From the very first days of his religious life, he was so humble, obedient, modest and conscientious that there could be no doubt he had determined to reform most completely the habits he had acquired while living in the world. So intent was he upon crushing out the pride, vanity, impatience, irritableness, fickleness and love for pleasure which had established themselves in his heart, that mortification, both interior and exterior, seemed to be his only concern and delight. And after a short time, so entirely did he master these inclinations, and so thoroughly did he conform his whole character to the humility and self-denial of Christ, that those who knew him as a secular would not have recognized him now to be the same person. He introduced into his life every virtue, and so uniform was his constancy in the practice of all the religious exercises, that his companions marvelled at the readiness with which he accommodated himself so perfectly to a life so opposed to the wordliness that had characterized him only a few months previous.

A letter written to a former companion, during the early part of his novitiate, is in-

dicative of the thoughts and sentiments that now ruled his life:

My dear Philip:—

You are correct in saying that the world is filled with hindrances to a holy life, and that it is quite difficult to save one's soul in it. Still, you must not become discouraged, because, even in the world, it is not impossible to become a saint.

Dear Philip, if you really love your soul, shun evil companions and avoid the theatre. I know from personal experience how hard it is to frequent such places and not be exposed to danger. Avoid also, parties and frivolous books. I assure you that it seems quite certain to me now, that had I remained in the world, I would not have saved my soul. Tell me, could any one have indulged in more amusements than I did? And what is the result? Only bitterness and fear."

In a letter addressed to his father he writes:

"The peace and happiness I experience within these hallowed walls is incomparable when contrasted with the vanities and pleasures that occupied me while in the world. Be assured, dearest father, and believe me, your own son, who speaks to you with both heart and lips, that I would not

exchange one quarter of an hour spent with Blessed Mary, our hope and consolation, for a whole year, or even any length of time, spent in the frivolities and diversions of the world."

Again, he writes:

"The twenty-four hours of the day seem hardly more than twenty-four brief moments which pass by most rapidly. Tell my uncle and aunt and all the family that my life as a Passionist is one of sweetness, peace and content. Oh, how sweet it is to serve God! My health is excellent, and my life full of happiness. Besides this, what is there I can desire more upon earth?"

In another letter he writes:

"My life is one continuous joy. The days and months pass by most quickly; and so sweet is the service of God that, besides the eternal reward which I hope, one day, to receive from His infinite mercy, He also gives me many consolations every day. What a grace it is to dwell in the house of God. How differently from the world does Our Divine Lord repay His servants. The miserable and fleeting pleasures of the world which are acquired with no little

effort, and are retained with difficulty, are poisoned with an infernal venom whose dregs must be drunk at the hour of death, and which will be a foretaste of the bitterness awaiting us in the world to come. Now, how well I understand the significance of those words which were spoken to me so often by you, by my teachers, and by others, and which then seemed to me to be so trite, and of such small import: that those who enter religion have chosen the better part; that they have arrived in a safe port, where they are protected from the storms; that they have escaped many perils, and have conquered the world, the flesh and the devil; and many other similar sayings. Happy is he who has been called to such a state, and has answered the summons immediately."

Thus, the year of Gabriel's probation was passed in learning the principles and acquiring the virtues of the religious state. It was passed, too, in the tranquillity and satisfaction of one who had found the object of his heart's fondest desire and his mind's highest ambition. Night after night, he arose at the matin hour to chant the praises of God, and day after day, he went through the unvarying routine of prayer and study and soli-

tude and silence of the novitiate. The fasts and penances tested his bodily strength, while humiliation, correction and unquestioning obedience tried the strength of his soul.

As each day came and went, this manner of life appealed more and more to him, and he became more and more convinced that, in it alone, could he find the peace and joy he craved. With vigilant eye, Father Norbert observed every trait of his nature, and every manifestation of his soul. He, too, became more and more persuaded that his disciple was well fitted for the life he longed to embrace. The beauty of his soul became more and more evident and showed, not only that he possessed the ordinary qualifications requisite for the life of a Passionist, but also that he was endowed, in an extraordinary degree, with those dispositions and characteristics which portend exalted holiness. Accordingly, when the year's noviceship was completed, Gabriel was admitted to his religious profession; that is, to take those sacred vows that bound him irrevocably to a life of evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience.

On the afternoon of September 22, 1857, before the same altar at which he had knelt

just one year before to cast off the attire of the world and put on the livery of Christ, Gabriel again prostrated himself to make to God the complete and perpetual offering of himself that was the one aim of his life. To symbolize his death to the world, a black pall was spread over him as he lay prone upon the sanctuary floor. The monastery bells tolled their solemn knell while the account of Christ's sorrowful Passion from the gospel of St. John was mournfully chanted. Then Gabriel rose and kneeling before Father Norbert, pronounced these momentous and life-binding words:

"I, Confrater Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, do vow and promise with simple vow and promise, to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary, ever a Virgin, to all the heavenly court, and to you, Father, poverty, chastity and obedience, and also to promote, according to my strength, in the hearts of the faithful, devotion to the Passion of Our Lord, according to the rules and constitutions of the Discalced Clerks of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

To which words Father Norbert responded:

"And I promise you, on the part of God, if you faithfully observe these promises, life everlasting. Amen." *

The sacrifice was over, and the great ambition of Gabriel's life was attained. And now he was the happiest youth in all the world.

* The Passionist Fathers take a fourth vow to promote devotion to the Sacred Passion of Christ.

CHAPTER X

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE HE PROFESSED

TO appreciate the perfection of life to which Gabriel had consecrated himself by the sacred vows he had taken, it is necessary to have a correct idea of what the religious state really is. For the sake of the reader who may not be familiar with it, we will interrupt the continuity of our narrative, and insert here a chapter that will set forth briefly its exalted ideals, and the means it offers for their realization.

The ideals of the religious state are so lofty and its requirements so exacting, that the average person has not the courage or heroism of soul to attempt their attainment: for, besides the common precepts given by Christ for the regulation of everyone's life, it demands also of those who profess it the observance of the so-called counsels of the gospel.

These counsels are not injunctions or com-

mands, but invitations given by Christ to those of His followers who would ascend above the lower levels on which the ordinary Christian is content to rest. To all men in general He says: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." To some in particular He says: "If thou wilt be perfect, come, follow me," thus calling them to a more intimate association with Him and His work. Those who answer the call become His picked men and women, to whom He confides the duty of manifesting to the world, in a special manner, the beauty and power of His sublime teachings, and to whom He entrusts the hard places in His service, where the utmost fidelity is needed and the bravest heroism required.

These counsels, or invitations, are embodied in what are called the religious vows of voluntary poverty, chastity and obedience. The counsel of poverty was given by Christ when He said to the rich young man: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me." That of chastity was given when He said to His apostles: "All men take not this word,

but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs, who were born so from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, who were made so by men: and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it." Although there are no words recorded in the gospel telling that Christ gave the counsel of obedience in terms so direct and express as he gives those of poverty and chastity, yet it is implied in the words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Every Christian, indeed, must deny himself and follow Christ in the essential and broader points of the law; but he who elects to follow Christ in the finer points of His teaching and example, is called upon to try to practise obedience to the perfection with which Christ himself practised it. And, we are told, Christ was obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross: and He himself said: "I do always the things which please my Father."

By the vow of poverty, the religious obligates himself to exercise no independent act of personal ownership over temporal goods,

for his own benefit. He enjoys merely the use of what is requisite for the proper discharge of the duties assigned to him. The vow of chastity forbids him all carnal pleasures, whether interior or exterior. The vow of obedience subjects his will to the will and judgment of lawful superiors, so that he may be guided by them according to the purpose and constitutions of the institute to which he has affiliated himself.

Thus he is called upon to sacrifice all those things which most people cherish as their inherent rights and inalienable privileges, and are loathe to relinquish. He is asked for a complete surrender of the pleasures, ambitions and personal prerogatives which, humanly speaking, impart to life much, if not all, of its interest. The heroism entailed in pursuing such a course of complete detachment for, perhaps, decades and even scores of years, is more than the generality of people are equal to. Consequently, the Church will allow no one to bind himself to it hastily and without adequate appreciation and knowledge of its responsibilities. She requires the aspirant to such a life to spend at least a year in the observance of the rules, or constitutions,

of the community he proposes to enter, and in the practice of the obligations imposed by the vows. Thus he is given a fair test of the life he intends to live, and is able to decide from personal experience whether he is capable of carrying its burdens. Thus, too, the religious community may observe the character, habits and abilities of the novice, and may form a correct judgment of his fitness for their conventual life. It is only when the novice himself and the members of the community are mutually agreed that he is adaptable to the religious state, that the Church will permit him to bind himself to it forever. When he embraces this state, he engages to live a life which, from both the human and the divine view-point, is the most excellent and satisfactory upon earth.

From the human view-point, the religious state is the closest approach to what statesmen and philanthropists consider the ideal condition of humanity. The aim of all philanthropists is to equalize, so far as is possible, the distribution of the resources and opportunities of nature, so that every man may have a fair chance to ameliorate his condition, and compete with his fellow men in the develop-

ment of character, talent and initiative. So, also, the endeavors of the most enlightened and progressive statesmen have always been to establish a federation that will provide for the common interests of men and defend them against tyranny and despotism, and to set up a sovereign tribunal where the evils resulting from injustice, oppression and autocracy may be remedied without recourse to military force and the shedding of blood.

And this, precisely, is the condition offered by the religious state. A common rule reduces all the members to the same level, so that the food, clothing, housing and occupation is the same for the noble and the plebean. A community of interests stimulates each and all to donate what is best in them to the common good—the individual being solicitous for the community, and the community for the individual. All enjoy equal opportunities for intellectual and moral development, and all have equal chance to attain success whether in sanctity or in human endeavor.

There is, indeed, the natural necessity of superiors and subjects: but even that condition is equalized by the fact that those who govern are elected by the free choice of those

who are governed; and those who rule today, may be ruled tomorrow by those over whom they were placed but yesterday.

Domineering during their tenure of office by those who are chosen to rule is prevented by a law which is recognized by all as having God himself for its author, and which entails eternal responsibility before His court—a law of fraternal benevolence which reads: "So long as you did it unto one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it unto me." And should this law fail of its purpose, there is a supreme tribunal of arbitration presided over by Christ's own Vicar himself, to which no appeal is ever taken in vain, when there is question of abuse of power, or arrogance of domination.*

*Most probably, it is not generally known that nearly everything that is admirable in the British Constitution, and in the Constitution of the United States, had its inspiration in the constitutions of the great religious orders. The idea of federation of units constituting a central organization for general government and administration, the strict autonomy of the province, and the house or monastry in all that concerns local administration, election by universal suffrage, the local superior's dependence upon the good will of his subjects for a voice in the council of his order, thus foreshadowing the principle of responsible government, were all written into the constitutions of religious orders when nations called great in our day, were still in the process of formation. Benjamin Franklin admitted that his contribution to the Constitution of the United States was the result of studying the constitution of the Dominican Friars.

Viewed from the angle of the divine or supernatural, we find that the religious state provides all the means that are requisite for the realization of the sublimest teachings of Christianity. It is a state which removes permanently all those things which usually stand as towering obstacles to the fulfilment of Christ's precepts and counsels.

The highest perfection of the gospel consists in centering one's entire self upon God alone. It is evident that the more the heart is drawn from the love of many things, the more will it be able to fix itself upon one particular object; and in so far as a person is drawn from love for, and interest in, the things of earth, in so far will he be able to attach himself to God and the things of eternity. And this is the whole philosophy of monasticism. Not yet has man been able to devise any other method of life that detaches the heart more completely from creatures, and directs its impulses more unreservedly to the Creator alone.

It is not merely a system of rules and observances which bind the members together in a unity of common life. It is a system which was inculcated and sanctioned by

Christ himself, and which has been developed and perfected through the centuries by the wisest and best of men. It detaches the one who embraces it, from money, from business interests, houses, lands, estates,—from all those temporal things which commonly engross the mind's closest attention; and instead, it bids him be content with the common requisites of life, so that, not being solicitous for what he shall eat and drink and wherewith he shall be clothed, he may seek first the kingdom of God and His justice. This detachment from earthly possessions, which is called poverty, does not imply destitution, indigence or beggary, things which might be repellent to the sensibilities of more delicate natures. It is only a relinquishment of all mercenary interests; a relinquishment which appeals to the finer and nobler instincts of the soul because it leaves it free to devote its energies unselfishly to the higher interests of God and humanity.

It is a system, too, which enables its devotee to hold the rebellion of unholy passions in constant subjection, by restraints that permit no latitude for the indulgence of the flesh and its concupiscences. It does not banish love

and affection from the heart. It only directs them into higher and holier channels. Instead of the human creature, to whom the heart would turn in tenderness, for confidence and affection, and in whom it would be absorbingly interested, and for whom it would live and work and suffer, religion silently turns all the energies and emotions of the heart to God alone, who is the purest and most amiable of beings.

By means of the obedience it demands, the monastic life gives its members the mastery over their own selfish pride and ambition. It is an obedience which does not reduce one to the condition of an automaton. It does not hinder the use or development of any talent or faculty that one may possess; nor does it deny personal initiative. It does not imply an unreasoning and unreasonable submission to authority. It requires only an intelligent recognition of the right of command in those legitimately placed in authority; and an honorable and rational submission to laws and ordinances that will advance the soul in the realization of his life's purpose. Instead of making him passive, inert, a mere unit in an established uniformity, it stimulates, directs

and sanctifies his activities and enterprises, and provides a wide latitude for the fullest expression of his individuality and freedom.

In short, it is a system whose only purpose is to model the life of all its followers after Him who is the All-Beautiful and the Most-Perfect. So abundant and efficacious are the facilities it provides for accomplishing this, that the most exalted sanctity is within the reach of all who care to attain to it. Its whole economy is "to compel by moral persuasion, the complete abandonment of one's entire being into the hands of God, and the venturing of everything for Christ and His blessed love."

The foregoing is an epitome of the method of life to which Gabriel committed himself on the day of his religious profession. And in its light must be viewed the rest of his career. Doubtless it was his high appreciation of the excellence of the religious state that impelled him so energetically toward the realization of its sublime ideals, for no one could live such a life so sincerely and intensely as he did, unless he appreciated its full worth.

So exactly did he conform his conduct to

every standard of the life he had embraced, that Father Norbert could say of him:

"In the observance of the rules of the community, Gabriel was truly a model to his companions and even to his seniors. He was exact in keeping all without exception, because he regarded them as the guiding forces of his religious life, and because he had voluntarily obliged himself to observe them. Never did he transgress any of them knowingly; nay, great would be his regret when sickness, or some other cause, made the observance of some points impossible; and it was plainly evident how much he was affected by not being able to be with the community. More than once, when I had dispensed him on the score of ill health, he feared lest I should have been moved by too much consideration for him: and he even had recourse to the higher superiors to get their advice in this matter, and when they gave him to understand that they approved of my dispensation, he used it with all simplicity. In his observance of the rules, he never took into account the personal discomfort to him that might be entailed. On the contrary, this was for him an additional reason for regularity, because it offered him the occasion of practising several virtues simultan-

eously. Had his superiors allowed themselves to be influenced by the eagerness he always displayed for observing the rule at any cost, he would have insisted on keeping many points from which moral impossibility naturally would have excused him. The fact that he was dispensed from any one particular act of the religious life, did not seem to him a reason for extending the dispensation to other points, though the same reason existed for both."

After his death, the following note was found among Gabriel's writings:

"This morning, Father Norbert held a conference with me on the beauty and excellence of the religious life. He gave me ideas of it I never had before: and now it stretches out before me like some glorious vista, radiant with the light of heaven, and teeming with richest blessings. Happy, indeed, am I to be called to such a life. And I must try to show my gratitude by an exact fulfilment of all its obligations. I would rather be a monk in my cell, than a king upon his throne."

CHAPTER XI

STUDENT DAYS

A FEW months after taking his religious vows, Confrater Gabriel was transferred from the novitiate at Morrovale to the monastery of the Passionists at Pievetorina. This retreat, as it was called, had been appointed as a house of study for the young clerics of the community preparing for the priesthood. Situated in the seclusion of a pretty, wooded villa, nestling at the foot of pine-clad hills, with groves of orange and olive trees stretching far beyond on every side, it was an ideal spot for students and study. Its quiet and solitude were seldom disturbed except by the voices of nature, and the solemn psalmody of the religious as they daily chanted the choir service of the Church's liturgy. Here Gabriel and nine other scholastics were to remain for little more than a year.

Here, too, Father Norbert accompanied

him, to continue the direction of his soul and to act as his professor in the studies he was to pursue. Thus, the master and the disciple were able to continue uninterrupted, the cultivation of the virtues of the religious life they had begun so auspiciously only a year before, and which had already produced such wonderful fruit.

The life of a Passionist student is very uniform, and seldom varies in the routine of its daily exercises. After five hours of sleep, he rises at two, A. M., and hastens to the chapel to chant *matins* and *lauds,* that part of the Church's official choral worship with which she ushers in the dawn of each new day. These two prayers, along with a short meditation, occupy the space of an hour and a half. He then retires to his cell and reposes until six o'clock, when *prime* and *tierce,*—another part of the breviary—are chanted. Mass follows, at which he receives Holy Communion, and then there is another Mass of thanksgiving. A light refection, consisting of bread and coffee, constitutes his breakfast. The next three hours are devoted to study and classes. Then come the examen of conscience and spiritual reading. One half hour is now

given to physical exercise, which usually consists in a vigorous walk in the cloister gardens. Once more he goes to chapel for *sext* and *nones,* the mid-day portion of the divine office. Dinner follows immediately, and then recreation for three quarters of an hour. The next hour is given to strict silence in his cell, during which time he may engage in any occupation or special study in which he is interested. *Vespers* are then sung, followed by the community lecture, or reading from some pious book. Again three hours are spent in study and recitation. Then, when the day is nearly done and the twilight shadows begin to lengthen, the Passionist repairs once more to the chapel to chant the closing psalms of the day's liturgy. Meditation for half an hour follows, and afterwards, the solitary walk in the garden. Supper, recreation and night prayers conclude the order of the day.

This *horarium* never changes except on the afternoons of Sunday, Thursday and feast-days, which are free for walks or recreation. There is an annual mid-summer vacation of six weeks, when the students lay aside their formal studies, but do not depart from the regular exercises of community life. This

vacation is always passed in the monastery and its environs. The students never return to their homes after they have taken their vows, except for some grave reason.

The year spent at Pievetorina was devoted by Gabriel entirely to reviewing the course in philosophy he had taken with the Jesuits at Spoleto. One of his companions writes of him at this time:

> "We all observed in him a remarkable kindness and consideration for his fellow religious. If any one became ill, Gabriel was the first to volunteer to wait upon him. So also, if he noticed any one to be in trouble, he was the first to assist and comfort him. If our superior had occasion to reprove or punish one of us for some fault, immediately he would interest himself in favor of his companion, and he gave himself no rest until he had induced the superior to dispense with the penance. And if the superior seemed unwilling to allow the fault to go unpunished, Gabriel would entreat him to permit him to perform the penance instead of his companion. So delicate was his thought for all that he never uttered a word that might hurt any one's feelings, and never did he manifest in any way that his own had been wounded. I

well remember that I often took pleasure in trying his patience, but his only retort was a gracious smile.

"We also remarked in him a tender devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He was truly enamoured of Christ in the Eucharist. Frequently, he spoke to his companions of his sacramental Lord with an emotion and vivacity so intense that he aroused the enthusiasm of those who listened to him. To Christ in the tabernacle his thoughts instinctively turned, and all the impulses of his heart impelled him to go before the altar to pour out his affections. Many times in the day and night, he would send his angel guardian to visit the Blessed Sacrament when his occupations would not permit him to do so in person. And sometimes he would tell his angel to go to the place where Christ was most lonely and forgotten, there to adore and keep vigil with Him.

"When out for a walk, if we entered a church, his first thought was to look for the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, and then to kneel before it in silent adoration. He became all affected and moved when he spoke of the coldness with which so many receive the Holy Eucharist, and of the outrages, profanations and sacrileges committed against It by unbelievers and even by bad

Christians. From these insults offered to Jesus he took occasion to admire His patience and mercy; and he would redouble his efforts to make reparation so far as he could.

"Frequent spiritual communion was one of his favorite practices, and he recommended it earnestly to his classmates, saying: 'In the hour of death we can say to Jesus: I have welcomed You, dear Lord, so often into my poor heart. Now You must welcome me to paradise with You.' I have often seen him prostrate himself before the tabernacle when he thought no one was near, and pour out all his soul before the Sacramental Christ. At other times, he would become so rapt in adoration during his visits that we had to shake him in order to remind him that it was time to discharge the other duties of our student life.

"His heart burned also with extraordinary devotion to the Sacred Passion. When he meditated on this subject, it seemed that his mind could fix itself on nothing else, and that the love and gratitude of his heart could be centred on nothing else. It was enough merely to allude to Christ's sufferings to make his fervent spirit burst into a sudden flame, like flax when touched with fire. He would at once begin to speak with wonderful fluency and en-

thusiasm, and this he would continue for a considerable length of time. At such times, his companions who had been conversing among themselves, would as if by a common impulse, turn to Gabriel and captivated by his extraordinary and touching words, listen eagerly to him as he spoke of the duty of sorrowing over the Sacred Passion of our Redeemer in union with His Blessed Mother.

"Gabriel's devotion to the sorrows of Mary was most singular; and I think he felt even more devotion to her than to the Passion or the Holy Eucharist. She was his predominant thought, his very heart, and his very all."

When Gabriel had finished his review of philosophy at Pievetorina, he was sent with his class-fellows to the retreat of the Immaculate Conception at Isola del Gran Sasso. This monastery had been opened but recently, and was assigned to the students of theology.

Father Norbert again accompanied his class to their new home, and here he and Gabriel were to remain until the end of the latter's short life. Writing to his father shortly after his arrival, Gabriel said: "The air of this locality is excellent, and the many

fruit trees to be seen here assure me that the climate must be very mild and healthful. I feel very contented, indeed, and am quite happy to be here."

Of his life here as a theologian, we are told that it would be difficult to describe the careful diligence with which he applied himself to so important a study. In order not to lose a moment of time, he was accustomed never to leave his cell during the period allotted to study. In order to remind him of the resolution he had made to husband every minute assigned to his books, he wrote on a little card: *Non Uscire di Cella* (Do not leave your cell); and attached it to the foot of the crucifix he kept always on his desk. This resolution he never broke except when, sometimes, he would go into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament to study a tract that was particularly difficult.

The words which, at this time, he addressed to his brother who had just been ordained to the priesthood, may be taken as indicative of the sentiments that actuated his own conduct. "Shun idleness, and apply yourself to study. One of the thoughts that frightens me when I think of becoming a priest is the study it demands, and few are the days on which this

reflexion does not occasion me serious thought."

To Gabriel, study was not merely an occupation, not merely an essential requisite for admission to the priesthood. To him knowledge was power: power, in the first place, that would enable him to discharge the work of the ministry for which he was preparing, not only efficiently, but in the full spirit of the Church, who bids her children learn wisdom from the lips of her priests, and who commands her priests not only to recognize the value of learning, but also to acquire it, and set it in motion in the great combat waged between mere human reason and divine revelation in the arena of human thought and moral responsibility.

In the second place knowledge, in his eyes, was power that would raise him to higher levels in the sanctity to which he aspired. To him the ultimate purpose of every endeavor was to know God better. He was accustomed to repeat to his companions the saying of one of the wise philosophers of the Middle Ages:

"Logic is good, which teaches us how to separate truth from falsehood; grammar is

good, which teaches us to write and speak correctly; rhetoric is good, which teaches us to speak with elegance and to persuade; geometry is good, which teaches us to measure the earth on which we dwell; so is arithmetic, or the art of reckoning, by means of which we can convince ourselves of the small number of our days; and music is good, which teaches us harmonies, and makes us think of the sweet song of the Blessed; and finally, astronomy is good, which makes us consider the heavenly bodies, and the virtues of the stars, darting forth splendor before God. But much better is theology, which alone can be truly called a liberal science, because it frees the human soul from its miseries, and prepares it for the acquiring of virtue."

And this the study of theology did for Gabriel. The sublime and amazing truths it unfolded before his mind—of God, His nature and His attributes—brought the divine Majesty closer to him and by its very beauty and splendor, enraptured his soul until, entirely overwhelmed by the divine attractiveness, his soul surrendered itself to God in completest love and profoundest homage. Thus his studies were for him an act of worship. Just as a person, after having looked upon the sun

in its dazzling brightness, seems to see suns floating about everywhere, so Gabriel, after seeing God in the glorious light of theology, saw Him also in every aspect of nature; and his soul exulted with gladness in contemplating the infinite forms in which the Eternal and All-Beautiful has clothed His mysterious loveliness. It created in him the intensest yearning to know more, and still more, about God.

Gabriel's readings from the great masters of the spiritual life had taught him that the eye which would see God must be pure and unclouded with earthly visions; that only the clean of heart can know Him; and that the measure of the soul's purity is the measure of its ability to know God, not merely speculatively and after the fashion of the schools, but intimately and personally after the manner of the saints, whose knowledge of God led them to so ardent a love for Him that it became the all-absorbing passion of their lives. And so he redoubled his efforts to acquire greater purity of heart, by profounder humility, more complete detachment and closer self-restraint.

Thus, Father Norbert tells us,

"He directed his attention chiefly to his interior, stripping his heart of its vices, and clothing it with the opposite virtues. He kept before his eyes his own nothingness and misery; his former life in the world, his propensity to evil, his weakness and selfishness. With all these motives he was deeply penetrated, especially during the time of meditation; and by this means he attained such a lowly opinion of himself that he greatly feared and distrusted self, relying in all things solely on the assistance of God's grace. He often said: 'Of myself I can do nothing. Of myself, I am capable only of sin, yes, even of the greatest crimes.' He spoke thus because he was thoroughly convinced that what he said was true.

"I remember well that in all he did, he placed no reliance on his own powers or efforts or talents. However, this mean opinion he entertained of himself did not make him depressed or indifferent. Rather, it filled him with greater courage to do whatever was pleasing to God, because he always maintained a strong and child-like confidence in his heavenly Father. And his confidence was not misplaced; for God blessed with success whatever he undertook to do. So far as I can remember, I never heard one word escape from his lips that might have, even indirectly, turned to his

praise. He never referred to anything that would redound to his own glory, whether regarding his secular or his religious life. Whatever was known about him, came not from him, but from others, because he studiously refrained from giving any information that might attract notice to him.

"He shunned as a very pest any shadow of self-complacency or vain glory. Once when he made an emblem of the Sacred Passion, such as is worn by the religious of our Congregation over their hearts, and observed that he had made it exceptionally well, he insisted that I let him exchange it for another one, lest it should occasion some emotion of vanity. He took delight in wearing clothes which had been worn by others and were poor and ill-fitting. His constant self-abasement, in word and deed, was so well disguised and hidden, so natural and spontaneous, that it did not bear the appearance of humility. He was most adverse to effusive expressions of humility, and concealed his sentiments with a quiet natural simplicity.

"Often I noticed how dexterously he sought to be the last and least of all, to take the lowest place, to be served last, and to choose the worst of everything. He looked upon all his fellow religious as his supe-

riors, and considered himself as the servant of all. All this, however, he did so cleverly that, unless one were used to his ways and acquainted with his interior, one would never think but that these things had happened of themselves. Many a time have I noticed that when some particular attention was paid to him, he felt so great embarrassment that he could not conceal it. He often requested me to reprehend him publicly, and when I neglected to do so, he would come to me and gently complain. When I would correct him, he fell on his knees immediately and remained in that posture until I told him to rise. I often reprimanded him for things I knew very well he had not done. Yet he never excused himself, nor by any sign indicated that he was not guilty. Even when I did not mean to reprimand him, but only to advise him, he would kneel and receive the admonition with the utmost respect and humility. Rising, he would say: 'Well, I need the advice very much, and I must try to correct myself.'

"When he perceived in himself anything which, if known to others, would bring contempt upon himself, he was sure to find some way of calling attention to it publicly. If circumstances rendered this inadvisable, he would make it known to me alone."

It was about this time that Gabriel composed the following prayer which he was wont to recite daily. Its very simplicity bespeaks the purity of his heart, and the singleness of his mind.

"Behold me at Thy feet, O my Lord, begging Thy pity and mercy. What wilt Thou lose by granting me a deep love for Thee, a profound humility, a great purity of heart, of mind and of body, a fraternal charity, a sincere sorrow for having offended Thee, and the grace to offend Thee no more? What wilt Thou lose, O my God, by enabling me to receive worthily Thy Beloved Son in Holy Communion, by assisting me to act through love for Thee in all my thoughts, works, penances and prayers; by bestowing upon me the favor of loving Thy holy mother most tenderly and trustfully; the grace of final perseverance in my vocation, and of dying a good and holy death?

"I am a beggar covered with wounds and rags, asking for alms. Behold, O Lord, all my wretchedness! See my proud intellect, my cold and stony heart! See my mind filled with worldly thoughts, my will disposed to evil, and my body rebellious to every good work!

"Help me, O my God, to correct myself. This grace I implore through Thine own

infinite goodness and mercy. To obtain it, I offer Thee the merits of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Master and Redeemer. I have no merits of my own. I am destitute of all good, but His wounds are my hope: *vulnera tua, merita mea.* Had I shed my blood for love of Thee, like Thy Son, would'st Thou not grant me this favor? How much more oughtest Thou to hear me now, since He shed His blood for me.

"Art not Thou He who has promised in Thy gospel that whatsoever I ask for the good of my soul, Thou wilt grant me: 'Ask and you shall receive.' Now, as Thou canst not recall Thy word, I beseech Thee to hear me. I supplicate Thee through Thine infinite goodness, through the heart of Thy Son wounded with love for me, through the infinite charity of the Holy Ghost, through the love Thou bearest toward Thy most holy daughter, Mary, and for the honor of the whole heavenly court, into which I ask Thee, one day, in Thy mercy to admit me. Amen."

Thus Gabriel's growth in holiness kept apace with his progress in learning; or rather, his progress in learning went before his soul, carrying the torch that lighted up the way which led to sublimer heights and broader

visions of the supernatural. And his soul hastened with eager steps to follow the ascent, until it could stand, serene and triumphant, in the full possession of Him who reveals His beauty to the pure of heart and to those who have separated themselves entirely from creatures and yielded their whole being to Him alone.

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CHAPTER XII

GROWTH IN HOLINESS

DURING the first year of his student life at Isola, Gabriel addressed the following letter to a former college mate, in whose spiritual welfare he seems to have been particularly interested.

My dear Philip:

If you sincerely desire your salvation, avoid, I beg of you, these things against which I am now about to warn you.

Avoid bad company; and by that I do not mean merely young fellows who know no restraint, and who are shameless and grossly immoral; by bad companions I mean those who, by influence and false friendship, would taint and pervert the heart. You, doubtless, understand me.

Avoid the theatre. I know it from experience. It is rare, yes, even very rare, to leave it without having lost the grace of God, or at least, without having exposed it to great danger.

Avoid dances, for in these all things conspire against the soul.

Avoid bad books, for they can cause frightful havoc in a young man's heart.

My dear Philip, I confess in all sincerity that I do not know whether a whole life spent in this religious community will suffice to make reparation for my faults; above all, for those which I have committed through the four things I have just mentioned.

I leave you to consider if I have spoken truly, since you were always my most intimate friend.

My dear Philip, I think I can say that, if I had continued to live in the world, I should not have been able to save my soul. Oh, no, it is impossible to be saved when one listens to bad conversations, when one exposes oneself to so many dangers, and in a word, when one frequents company where the spirit of the world holds sway.

Tell me, could I have had more amusements than I had while in the world? Well, what now remains to me of it all? Nothing but regrets, fears and anxieties.

Listen to me. When I was in the world, I confess that I did not always make known to you the real feelings of my heart; but I assure you that I speak to you today with the greatest sincerity, and as a true friend.

I tell you I desire only one thing in your regard. It is that, on the dread day of the general judgment, if my own soul is saved, I may find myself with you under the protecting mantle of Mary.

Ah, my dear Philip, if you have listened in the past to the bad advice I gave you, I beg you not to misunderstand me now. I have received numerous tokens of your friendship. I preserve its happy remembrance, but today, I ask, I beg, only one thing of you—that you will not disregard the letter of a friend who speaks to you from an overflowing heart. Would to God that it were possible for you to read what is in my heart.

Dear Philip, do not smile at me, for it is my heart that speaks. I ask your pardon for all the scandal that I may have given you and I declare that I wish to retract all the evil I may have spoken against anyone. I pray you to forget it all. Ask our Lord, too, to pardon me.

Doubtless Gabriel's humility made him exaggerate the seriousness of the faults of which he accuses himself in this letter. Still, written as it was in all confidence to his young friend and without any suspicion that it would ever fall into other hands, it may be regarded as

the unreserved expression of the keen regret he experienced because of his former life of worldliness, and also of the desire he entertained that others might be filled with the same spirit of entire devotedness to God that now actuated him.

Another letter sent to his father expresses similar sentiments.

Dearest Father:

Warn my brothers, especially Cencio, not to become intimate with school companions who are not noted for virtue. Do not be contented, dearest father, with daily giving them those counsels that you used to give to me. Take the greatest care in this matter, because you cannot be too careful. Do not take them to the theatre, or even to evening parties, under any pretext whatsoever. Doubtless, all are not as weak as I was; I am quite sure of that. Still, all these things are dangerous. O my God, how many sighs does the remembrance of them cost me! I assure you in all sincerity that, from the moment I began to frequent such places, I was full of hypocrisy. And, alas, into what an abyss should I not have fallen, had not Mary, who is so full of goodness even to those who do not pray to her, come to my help on that memorable

day of her Assumption. As you have a real anxiety for the salvation of your children, be inflexible in this matter I have just mentioned.

Another subject for sighs and tears to me is those accursed novels. How I wish I had never read them! They appeared harmless at the time, but they were really so many devils in disguise.

From these two letters it would seem that, viewed in the light now illuminating his soul, the mere recollection of the giddy life he had lived in the world was like a dreadful nightmare from which he recoiled in fear and horror. And when he wrote in his note-book: "Oh, the vanity, the madness, the blindness, the deceit of the world! Who can deplore sufficiently the misery and misfortune of those who lose themselves, while pursuing it!"—he was but declaring the sincere and indubitable convictions of his mind.

So set was he upon removing himself from everything that might revive memories of the past and retard him in that complete separation from creatures which he had proposed to himself, that he was reluctant to receive visits even from his own relatives. He told his father:

"You may well imagine how happy I should be to see once more relatives whom I love so tenderly. But as I foresee that a visit from them would be a source of great distraction to me, I beg you to tell them that I appreciate their kind intentions, but that, for the reason just stated, I should prefer that their visit be postponed.

"Dearest father, knowing how ardently you desire my eternal salvation, I have not the slightest doubt that you will explain clearly to them what I have told you. I have, in fact, resolved to avoid any such distractions and I am positively determined to keep this resolve so far as I can, even at the risk of being impolite. You must not be surprised at this resolution. I know my own weakness and while I fall into my faults daily, I still wish to remove from the enemy every possible occasion, even the remotest, of tempting me into other faults.

"Do not imagine that this decision has been imposed upon me, or even hinted at, by my superiors. They would, probably, not object to these visits and would put no obstacle in their way. It comes solely from my own weakness which obliges me resolutely to avoid everything that might give the devil the least hold on me."

This resolution did not proceed from a lack of natural affection, nor from a thought that his new method of life demanded from him a crushing out of the innate love for relatives and friends, which both God and nature have planted in every human heart. In another letter he makes this very manifest:

Dearest Father:

Do not believe, as some wrongly do, that because he is in religion, a child forgets the love he owes his father and all that his parents have done and suffered for him. I can tell you that, on the contrary, in embracing religion, one perfects the tenderness he had for his own family, and that one always preserves the grateful remembrance of benefits received. Dear father, in spite of my unworthiness, I appoint from this moment, for your consoler and your protectress, Our Lady of Sorrows, who is the comforter of all men, especially of those who are in sorrow. Also, when you would wish to have letters from me, visit her, and tell her it is her part to console you, and to fulfil better than I could myself, the duties of a son toward his father.

Indeed, all through his religious life, Gabriel retained a deep filial affection for his

father and family, to which he gave vent frequently in words of fondest endearment. But it was an affection he had spiritualized by sublimating it in the charity of Christ.

By this relentless and almost cruelly refining process, Gabriel reached such a degree of perfect detachment from the world, that he did not even care to speak of it; and when, occasionally, some worldly topic would be introduced innocently into conversation, he would divert it tactfully to something else, remarking playfully: "Oh, what do we want with these things we have given up! Let the dead bury their dead."

With this complete detachment from the world so firmly established in Gabriel's soul, it was not long until God lifted him to a life of closest union with Himself: so close that nothing could distract him from the realization that he was living always in the very presence of God. So habitual and intimate did this union become, that every moment and action of the day were lived under its influence; and it made his conduct so exact and perfect that, having been asked one day by a companion, what he should do, were he to be told that he was to die immediately, he replied

with naïve simplicity: "I should do neither more nor less than continue doing what I would be engaged in at that very moment."

"What if it came," retorted the companion, "while you were in the dining room taking your meal, or while you were in bed?"

"I should continue eating or resting," answered Gabriel, "because I should then be doing only my duty; for can we not, even while eating or sleeping, make good acts with our hearts to dispose ourselves for a good death?" And he concluded by repeating his favorite maxim: "No, no; our perfection does not consist in doing big and exceptional things, but in doing well the common things prescribed by the rule, and those which pertain to our particular occupation, because the merit of our actions comes entirely from the interior dispositions with which they are performed. God does not regard so much what we do, as how we do it."

Gabriel's interior union with God made his life a continual prayer; and he held converse with Him as familiarly as does a child with its own father. He sensed the nearness of God as he would the physical presence of a bosom friend, and the joy and delight he ex-

perienced because of this mystical friendship were more real and intense than any that could come with the strongest human attachment.

Father Norbert assures us that:

"Whether at study or recreation, alone or in company, in the class room or in the chapel, he was uniformly recollected with God in the superior part of his soul. He experienced greater ease and relish in communing with the Divine Majesty than others find in the most congenial occupations; while, on the contrary, for him to turn his mind away from God and holy things was almost an impossibility. God had become his life, because He had become the only object of his love; and the peace of heaven, which surpasseth all understanding, so possessed his soul that he often said: 'My life is full of joy: what more can I enjoy in this vale of tears? I could not be happier than I am.'

"One morning as I was passing along the corridor on which his cell was located, Gabriel heard the sound of my footsteps. Leaving his desk, he opened the door of his room and beckoned me to come in. When I had entered he said to me, very humbly and with emotion: 'Tell me, Father, do you know of anything in my heart, however

small, that is not pleasing to God: because with His help, I want to strip it of everything at any cost, that is not for Him.' He said this in a tone so resolute, and emphasized it with a gesture of both hands so determined, that I could not but wonder and admire. To put him at ease, I replied that I knew of nothing in his soul that might cause displeasure to God; and in truth, I did not. He was much comforted by my assurance, and thanked me profusely. I can and do assert that, during all the time I had the direction of his soul, namely for five years, I do not recall his having committed even one deliberate venial sin."

He did not attain this great perfection, however, unmolested, and without the fiercest opposition from the devil. There were times when the evil one became so furious and assailed him with such vehemence that Gabriel suffered indescribable agony. He annoyed him with such abominable suggestions against God, he urged him to utter against the Divine Majesty such diabolical blasphemies, that he hesitated to give even a hint of them to his director, and when he did disclose them, he was almost breathless with horror. These at-

tacks were signally defeated, and instead of turning him away from God, they drew him all the closer.

The illumination of the divine Presence abiding within him shed its radiance upon all things, enabling him to see them in their correct perspective, and as they are estimated by God himself. In that blessed light even the most trivial and commonplace things assumed large proportions, because of their consequences through eternity. Thus he was elevated completely from the region of speculation and uncertainty. His whole concept of life was different from that commonly taken by most people. The standards by which he measured and valued things were different from those usually followed by the average person.

In that blessed light, too, he saw himself—saw his own nothingness, indeed, when his soul was apart from God; but when it was suffused and supernaturalized by His grace, he beheld it capable of unlimited possibilities. And so, like the vine clinging to, and climbing up the trellis, which, by every law of its nature, is impelled to mount higher and higher still, Gabriel, clinging to God, reached

out with every impulse of his soul to sublimer eminences, not content until he should have attained the height where the sun of justice would reflect in him unclouded the very image of God himself.

In that light he beheld also, the ineffable beauty of God himself. And straightway he was smitten with love for Him. Enraptured by that exquisite loveliness, he became all aglow with enthusiasm to please and honor Him: and there were times when his soul seemed almost mad, because it was held back by the trammels of the finite and human from executing its desires to render supremest delight to this all-absorbing object of his affections. The exultant eagerness of this desire made him, on the one hand, shrink back in consternation from even the smallest infidelity, and on the other, compelled him to impart to every act of his service, the utmost delicacy of perfection. Thus his director could say of him: "Whatever he did, he did with interior dispositions that were altogether extraordinary. This explains the high esteem in which he was held by those who knew him, and accounts for the mature sanctity attained by so young a servant of God."

CHAPTER XIII

ATTRACTIVENESS OF HIS CHARACTER

PARADOXICAL though it be, the crushing out from Gabriel's heart of all human attachments, and his close intimacy with God described in the preceding chapter, left him, nevertheless, very human—human in those things which make one lovable and which unveil the finer qualities of our nature when it has been divested of selfishness and sin.

His disdain for the world and its vanities did not make him disdainful of those who lived in it or whose standards of correct conduct were not as exalted as his own. He did not forget that he was still upon earth and among men, to whom he owed the duty of patience and cheerfulness and broad helpfulness. Nor did the deep piety and undisturbed recollection of his soul make him austere and stern-visaged, investing him with a kind of repelling awe which kept others aloof from

him. Rather, they imparted to his personality a charming attractiveness that drew his associates nearer to him and even made them rival one another in devising little schemes and plans that would lead to closer intimacy with him; as for example, to be his companion on the walks they were accustomed to take, or to be associated with him in the discharge of some domestic duty, or even to wait upon him when he was ill. For with all his holiness and exactitude of life, they found him a most congenial and affable companion: one who would laugh with them, and joke and be merry and light-hearted, who would throw himself joyously into youthful sports and gladdening recreation, and who would identify himself with everything that was of interest or concern to them.

One of his classmates tells us:

"He possessed the inestimable gift of undisturbed joyfulness. Serenity was stamped on his face, it shone from his eyes, it appeared in his smile, and it spoke in every word, so that he was the delight of his companions. This spirit of joy, however, was not excessive or extravagant. It might be called a modest joy which is the daughter

of modest happiness. His fellow students wondered at it, and wished that they too were similarly blessed. It seemed that a ray of celestial brightness accompanied him wherever he went, and that a fountain of divine sweetness flowed constantly from his heart. A holy unction of spirit graced him at all times, regulating all his words and actions, so that his very company was a school of virtue and edification."

He had the unusual and enviable quality of accommodating himself to every situation so readily and cordially, that he gave the impression that he had no likes or dislikes of his own, and that each circumstance, as it occurred, was just what he himself wanted. His temper was so even, and his cheerfulness so uniform, that one could not discover, even from the expression of his countenance, whether a thing displeased or annoyed him. Any one who is familiar with student life, knows how many small vexations will occur inevitably from time to time. Yet they never ruffled the calm and repose of Gabriel's demeanor. Sometimes, his companions would complain and show chagrin because of these annoyances, but Gabriel would only smile and say: "Well, Confrater, you know things might

be much worse. There are so many good and pleasant things that happen to us; let us think about them, and overlook our little disappointments."

Fra Sylvestro, a lay brother who discharged the office of infirmarian at Isola and who had frequent occasion to wait upon Gabriel, used to remark in his quaint, significant way, to some of the others who were not so even-tempered: "If everybody in this house were as pleasant and agreeable and easily satisfied as Confrater Gabriel, I might not be in such a hurry to get to heaven."

Although, externally, Gabriel never manifested his personal preferences, it would be untrue to say that, interiorly, he was wholly indifferent to the natural impulses that drew him to some persons and things more than to others. Yet, even though he knew quite well that these emotions of his heart were not incompatible with the high virtue at which he aimed, he was very vigilant over them and careful to hold them in close restraint. He would defer for a while, and even avoid almost entirely, any companionship with them that might gratify these inclinations, excepting that required by the community life

he was living, and the dictates of gentle courtesy. On the other hand he studiously selected as his favorites, those toward whom he might feel any disinclination; and it was interesting to observe how cleverly he would manage to be thrown with them, and how delicately he extended to them every attention. He did it so tactfully, however, and so naturally, that no one suspected his real motives. To his director alone, he confided the sentiments of his heart, and he assures us that he himself was not a little surprised and edified at the refinement of virtue practised by Gabriel on these occasions.

The kindly consideration he cherished for every one made him alert to forestall their wants, and to lend his assistance where needed. So solicitous was he in this matter that Father Norbert once called him a busy-body; whereat Gabriel playfully replied: "Well, father, Our Lord once told Martha that she, too, was busy about many things, and yet she was a great friend of His. If we all sit at His feet like Mary, the work will never be done."

He was careful, however, that he himself should be the occasion of no inconvenience to others, nor would he permit any one to wait

on him if he could possibly prevent it. He would say: "In the monastery, every one is his own servant. Christ waited upon Himself in His home at Nazareth, and it is an honor for His followers to do likewise."

His thoughtfulness for the sensibilities of all in the community was so delicate that Father Norbert did not hesitate to say:

"Charity so completely swayed him that no one could ever take any offence from his words and actions, and I do not remember ever to have heard any one make the smallest complaint against him. So tender was his conscience in regard to charity that he was habitually fearful lest he might, in some way, inadvertently hurt his companions. If he suspected that he had, he would humbly apologize before them all. Falling on his knees before the one he thought he might have offended, he would say: 'Won't you please forgive me this time?' and he would not rise until he was assured that he had been pardoned. Sometimes he would be told, 'No, I will not pardon you, because you have done nothing to offend me.' Then Gabriel would look at those around him, and say, 'You do not perceive my faults. Of myself, I can do no good, but Our Blessed Mother will help me to

amend.' Then rising, he would continue the discourse with his companions with great joy and serenity."

In the theological debates which it was customary for the students to hold from time to time, Gabriel defended his theses with arguments so clear and convincing that it was quite impossible to refute them. But he presented them with such grace and suavity, that his opponent accepted defeat without embarrassment. If, in spite of the cogency and evident correctness of Gabriel's reasoning, his adversary persisted in maintaining contrary views, even though it was apparent that he realized the force of the arguments, Gabriel would end the discussion with some witty pleasantry and leave the thesis in the hands of the opponent.

Nor was his kindliness limited to those with whom he lived in the intimacy of conventual life. It reached out to all who needed comfort and help. Father Norbert records:

"Sometimes, in the midst of our walks, when we were resting on the road, if a beggar chanced to pass by, Gabriel would ask leave to speak to him. He took advantage

of such occasions to teach the poor how to bear the burden of their poverty. He would inculcate a filial devotion to the Madonna, he would remind them that the Son of God chose to be poor and to submit to all the inconveniences of poverty. He urged them to remember the sufferings of Jesus, and he spoke to them of the great reward prepared for the sanctified poor in heaven. Having thus comforted and encouraged them, he sent upon their way these unfortunate ones whose souls, perhaps, were more famished than their bodies."

In his letters, too, Gabriel frequently pleaded the cause of the poor, asking his good father and the entire household to be generous toward them. In these appeals we find the following sentiments:

"Rest assured of this, my dearest father, that charity never impoverished any one: on the contrary, the blessing of the poor will call down upon you and all the family, the blessing of heaven. Christ has told us that whatever we do for the poor, He considers as done to Himself. One of the greatest consolations at the hour of death will be to remember that you never sent the poor from your door empty-handed."

Even those who were openly wicked and whose actions occasioned great harm to the Church and religion, were not excluded from his charity. He would listen silently and respectfully to the outpourings of righteous indignation which others might utter against them, but he himself would not say a word of condemnation.

Thus, in 1860, while he was at Isola, the revolutions that were sweeping over Italy, had found their way even into the little towns and villages adjacent to the monastery. The religious could hear the sound of the artillery from the not far distant fortress of Civitella del Tronto. Daily they saw bands of reactionaries and brigands scurrying about from one place to the other. Once, in the depth of night, the monastery was surrounded by a band of these outlaws, who were armed to the teeth and demanded food. The government had forbidden any supplies to be given them under penalty of death. The fear and anxiety of the religious was beyond description. In all the uncertainty and excitement, however, Gabriel maintained his habitual tranquillity and cheerfulness, saying: "We are in the hands of God. He is thinking of us,

and nothing can happen to us without His permission." And throughout all that distressing time, he conducted himself in his usual calm manner. In a letter to his family at this time he said:

> "The men who are the instigators of this dreadful condition of affairs, should be regarded as instruments in the hand of God to test the fidelity of the good and to punish the sins of the wicked and to purify the Church. Toward these enemies of order and the Church, we should not harbor any rancor nor the desire of revenge. We ought to commiserate them, while we pray with the Church: 'That Thou wouldst deign to humble the enemies of the Church.'"

The charity he felt for the living, Gabriel also cherished toward the dead.

> "In all my life," reports Father Norbert, "I have never known any one who was so anxious to gain indulgences for the souls in purgatory. And he was not content with gaining them himself. He exercised a kind of apostolate among his companions, inducing them to do the same. In behalf of these suffering souls he renounced all the satisfactory merits of his good works, plac-

ing them in the hands of Our Blessed Lady, to be used by her as she desired in favor of the holy souls."

Even the very birds and beasts and flowers shared his thought and kindness. He was as tender toward them as the gentle Francis of Assisi, after whom he had been named and whose spirit he seems to have caught in no small degree. He would caress the flowers and fondle the beasts and say: "God in His love made them for us, and they speak to us of His goodness and beauty."

There was only one with whom he was stern and for whom he would make no allowances; and that one was himself. He was actuated by a spirit of penance and austerity so severe that his director was obliged to check the rigor with which he treated his body.

"Had I not restrained him," declares Father Norbert, "his fervor would have impelled him to perform so many penances that in a short time, he would have imperiled his health. In fact, he was so inclined to these things at the beginning, that it was not easy to dissuade him from them. In order to obtain permission for certain penances which I considered imprudent

for him to perform, he would urge all the reasons his ingenuity could devise, and with such cleverness that he would have gained his point, had I not been extremely vigilant.

"When I mentioned his delicate constitution, he would reply: 'If we are to pay attention to such things, we will never do anything painful.' Or again: 'What is that for such a sinner as I am? Many saints, although in very poor health, practised far harder things than I am asking to do. St. Aloysius was told that, on his death bed, he would regret the austerities he had performed and yet we know that he was not troubled at all at the last moment. I suppose the saints were peculiar on that point.' "

The companions with whom one associates constantly and intimately, necessarily influence and mould one's habits and ideas. Hence, when we remember the close companionship which Gabriel kept with God, whose very name is love, and how minutely he endeavored to fashion his life, in all its details, after that of Christ, who was the meekest and the gentlest of men, we are not surprised that his character should have been so sweet and attractive, and that gentleness and tenderness

should have radiated from him everywhere, like broad, golden sun beams bringing joy and gladness and inspiration to all that is good.

The suavity and serenity manifested in his exterior conduct was only the reflection of the happiness and calm he experienced continually within his own heart, which itself was the reflex of the smile of God beaming always upon his soul, a smile won for him because of the fidelity and sincerity with which he lived the religious life he had vowed to God.

An extract from another letter written to his father about this time, bespeaks the joy and satisfaction that fidelity and sincerity imparted to his entire being:

> "How truly has a devout servant of God said: 'If people of the world knew the peace and calm and the other blessings of the religious state, the monasteries would become populated like cities, and the cities would become deserts.'
>
> "Yes, it is truly sweet to serve God and His Blessed Mother. There is more sweetness in one hour of prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, than in all the world's crowded theatres, and brilliant drawing rooms, and giddy diversions, and

social gatherings, which can never appease the desires of the heart.

"How much more pleasure there is in a little walk all alone within the cloister walls, with the thought that Mary, our Queen and the true lover of our souls, is hovering near, than in the noisy excursions of the world, which always leave a void in the heart which the world can never fill.

"How consoling and refreshing it is to a religious to know when evening comes that, through the divine mercy, he has spent the entire day in the service of that Good Master who knows how to reward those who serve Him, and who will not fail to recompense even the smallest action done for love of Him. With what sentiments of satisfaction, I say, may such a religious lay himself to rest upon his little cot, only to rise again to sing the praises of God. How sweet and easy does the yoke of the Lord become when, day after day, it is borne with the hope that soon we shall be freed from this wretched body and, with no regrets for having to leave this world's goods, we may pass into the enjoyment of God forever more."

CHAPTER XIV

DEVOTION TO MARY

HE WHO loves Christ must also love His mother. There can be no sanctification without an affectionate attachment to both. Devotion to Mary, especially under the title of Mother of Sorrows, was Gabriel's characteristic. In this he was truly extraordinary and he stands, as it were, in a sublime solitude all his own. Not only was his devotion to her extraordinary. It was also unique.

Father Norbert, the guide of his soul, declares:

> "It is impossible for me to describe how sincere, tender and ardent was his love for Mary, the Sorrowful Mother, and how absolutely it had taken possession of his entire heart. Not only have I never witnessed anything like it in anyone else, but I do not recall ever having read of anything that compared with it. Its equal may be found,

perhaps, only in a few of the greatest saints."

After reviewing the story of Gabriel's life, Cardinal Parrochi asserted:

> "Mary was the very soul of his life, the source and inspiration of his exalted holiness: and it may be said without fear of challenge, that hardly has he been equalled in his love and devotion to her by even the greatest saints. His devotion was manifested by so many unusual acts that it was the conviction of those who knew him, that God had raised him up in the Church for the express purpose of illustrating to the clients of Mary, how filial and tender should be their attachment to her."

When God fashions a new saint, it is, usually, to exemplify in a very pronounced way, some attribute of His divinity, or the practice of some particular teaching of Christ, or the spiritualizing effects of some devotion in the Church. Like the mountains the foundations of which rest in the common earth and rise in one mass for some distance until they separate and stand apart, each commanding attention and admiration by its own peculiar formation and altitude, so, too, all

the saints are established in a common love for God and an intimate union with Him. Then they rise, as it were, connectedly, in the heroic imitation of Christ's life and virtues; and finally, separate and distinguish themselves, one from the other, by some particular practice or devotion which signalizes them, and gives them a place all their own in the history of the Church. And thus it was that, after having knit Gabriel fast to Himself by ties of strongest love, God fashioned him to manifest in his life a devotion to Mary so exceptional that, in this matter, he stands almost unexampled in all the catalogue of the saints.

Gabriel's devotion to Mary the Sorrowful Mother must have begun rather early in his life, for, after he became a religious, we find in the letters he addressed to his family, frequent reference to a little statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, to which he seems to have been much attached while at home. Thus, in one letter he writes:—

> "I should be glad if you would take special care of the plaster statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, which was once mine, and make it the means of nurturing your own

devotion to her. If you will do this, you will give me the greatest pleasure, and you will do something also that is very pleasing to the Blessed Virgin."

Again he wrote: "Take good care of the little image of Mary which I left at home, and which I recommended to Pacifica when she came to see me."

It is certain, too, that he belonged to the *Confraternity of The Seven Dolors,* and that he kept a light burning, day and night, before the image of the *Pietà* in his room.

It was after Gabriel's complete surrender to Mary, however, on the day of his remarkable vocation to the religious life, that his love for her became the dominating influence of his life. From that moment, he was smitten with love for her, and so impassioned did it become, that he called her 'The heart of his heart, the soul of his soul, and his very heaven on earth.'

It impelled him to do things which some may consider foolish and extravagant, as for example, when he pleaded with his director for permission to burn, or carve, her name over his heart; and when this was denied, he did not rest until he had persuaded Father

Norbert to allow him to paint her name there and keep it ever fresh until his very death.

His eyes seemed never to turn from the contemplation of her beautiful face and he copied her as an artist copies a masterpiece, stroke for stroke, and lineament for lineament. To be pure like her, he emptied himself of every earthly affection. To feel that he was sharing with her, her pains and sufferings, he fasted and scourged and punished himself. He penetrated into the inner meaning of her sorrows, far beyond the point where mere calculation and conjecture can follow, and there he pondered the divine reasons for her deep affliction: and then, falling down, he adored the eternal decrees which ordained that she should be a co-redemptrix with Christ, and that like Him, she too, in her heart, should be wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins, and that wherever the story of Christ's sufferings would be told, there also would it be narrated that Mary His mother had suffered with Him.

In return, Mary cherished him as fondly as a mother cherishes her darling child. She poured her favors upon him in prodigal abundance, and so communicated her spirit

to him that there were times when his very features seemed to be the reflexion of her own sweet face, beautiful with the pensive beauty of patient sorrow, and serene with the calm of suffering lovingly borne.

The love and attachment for her that burned within Gabriel's soul, found external expression in a thousand graceful acts which indicated the eagerness of his heart to be not only wholly devoted to her himself, but also to bring others to her love and service.

Hardly had he entered the novitiate when he sought to bind himself by vow to become "Our Lady's Champion" by spreading devotion to her among the faithful. This favor was denied him at the time, but nearly five years later, after persistent pleading, he succeeded in having his desire gratified. His health was failing at the time, and he was so weak that the least effort quite fatigued him, but with the assistance of one of the Brothers, to whom he confided the secret of the privilege granted him, he adorned, as for a great feast, a little private chapel of Our Lady in the monastery at Isola. And there, unknown to all except the court of heaven and his director, he made his vow into the hands of Father

Norbert. And no chivalrous knight ever rose from his accolading with such pride and delight as did Gabriel that evening, after he had pledged himself before heaven to be the champion of her who is the fairest of all the daughters of men.

Before being permitted to take his vow, Gabriel had proved to his director in ways as various as they were numerous, how capable he was of fulfilling such a promise. He himself declared that not a day passed by on which he did not crown his Lady with flowers of virtue. And to symbolize these flowers of virtue, he placed daily on her altar, when possible, a vase of fragrant blossoms which he himself had culled with his own hands. He cultivated with great care a little corner of the cloister garden which he called "Our Lady's Bower." Here he raised the choicest flowers which were used exclusively for the decoration of her shrine. In winter time, he kept on hand a number of ferns and potted plants which he cared for solicitously, and thus throughout the entire year he managed to keep Mary's altar beautifully adorned.

Every time the clock struck the hour, he saluted his Madonna by repeating the *Hail*

Mary. He requested his confessor to permit him to do this even during the night, confident that, by recommending himself to Mary before retiring, he could depend upon her to see that he would awaken hourly to perform this act of devotion. The prudent confessor refused the permission, saying that Mary would be better pleased if her champion took the sleep prescribed by his religious rule and necessary for the preservation of his health.

During the forty days preceding the feast of the Assumption, which Gabriel called 'Our Lady's Lent,' he abstained from fruit and delicacies of every kind, although naturally, he was very fond of them and this was the season of the year when they were at their best and most abundant.

On one of these feasts, Gabriel made a promise to Mary that he would never refuse anything it was in his power to give, when it was asked in her name. And this promise he kept faithfully. In his last illness he had a nausea for all kinds of food. In order to induce him to take some nourishment, the infirmarian would say coaxingly, "For the sake of the Madonna, take just a little"; and,

immediately, Gabriel would smile and take the food offered.

He composed a kind of canticle in honor of his Lady, which he called her 'Creed.' It was based upon the sayings he had culled from his readings of the great saints and doctors of the Church.

Our Lady's Creed

I believe, O Mary, that thou art the mother of all men.

I believe that thou art our life and, after God, the sole refuge of sinners.

I believe that thou art the strength of Christians, and their help, especially at the hour of death; that following thee, I shall not stray; that praying to thee, I shall not be abandoned; that standing with thee, I shall not fall.

I believe that thou art ready to aid those who call upon thee, that thou art the salvation of those who invoke thee, and that thou art willing to do more good for us than we can desire; that even when not asked, thou dost hasten to our assistance.

I believe that in thy name is to be found a sweetness like to that experienced by St. Bernard in the name of Jesus—that it is joy to the heart, honey to the mouth and music

to the ears and that, after the name of Jesus, there is no other name through which the faithful receive so much grace, so much hope and so much consolation.

I believe that thou art a co-redemptrix with Christ for our salvation, that all the graces which God dispenses pass through thy hands, and that no one will enter heaven except through thee who art rightly called the 'Gate of Heaven.'

I believe that true devotion to thee is a most certain sign of eternal salvation.

I believe that thou art superior to all the saints and angels, and that God alone surpasses thee.

I believe that God has given to thee in the highest possible degree, all the graces, special and general, with which He can favor His creatures.

I believe that thy beauty and excellence surpass that of all angels and men.

I believe that thou alone didst fulfil perfectly the precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God": and that the very seraphim of heaven can learn from thy heart how to love God.

I believe that if all the love which all mothers have for their children, all that all husbands and wives have for each other, all that all the angels and saints have for those who are devoted to them, were united in

one, it would not equal the love that thou has for even one soul.

When Gabriel conversed with the priests of the community on their return to the monastery after having conducted missions, he would enquire whether they had preached devotion to Mary, and on being assured that they had, he could not suppress his delight and with great earnestness, he would entreat them never to omit giving at least one sermon on Mary, saying that, through her, they could draw more sinners to God than through any other means.

One of his fellow-students once asked him if he had any desire to be sent to the foreign missions. "Yes," he replied, "if it be the will of God, and I would labor to make the poor benighted people know and love my sweet Mother."

During the last year of his life when, because of his declining health, he was ordered by the physician to remain out in the open air as much as possible, he occupied his time with giving instructions in catechism to the simple country folk who were scattered over the fields shepherding their flocks. He never

failed to take advantage of this opportunity to instil into their hearts his favorite devotion to Mary. The following incident was related by one who had known and heard him at that time.

"I knew the young student Gabriel very well. One morning as I was driving the cattle out to grass, I saw him coming toward me. He met me and accompanied me for some distance. Then, when about to leave me and return to the monastery, he turned and said, 'Think frequently of Our Blessed Lady today, and say three *Hail Marys* to her often.' He said this with so much sweetness and grace that I resolved to do so. In fact, I said the prayers about a half dozen times. As I was returning in the evening, I saw Gabriel coming to meet me. He asked me whether I had said the prayers. I told him that I had, but he did not seem quite pleased. He said that I had done very little.

"The next morning the same thing occurred, and when we reached the place where we were to part, he counselled me again to pray to the Most Holy Mary. I replied that, as I had to look after the cattle, I could not always think of saying as many prayers as he recommended. He was not

pleased with my answer. He said I should pray with all my heart. 'What,' he said, 'will it cost you so very much to say the three *Hail Marys?* Don't you know what good the Blessed Virgin can do for you? She can make you a saint; she can save you from every kind of evil.' And he added many more beautiful sayings. That day I prayed more. On my return in the evening, Gabriel again came to meet me, and again asked me to give an account of my devotions. He was not satisfied this time either.

"The third day, about the same hour, as I was driving out the cattle, I saw him walking toward me with a medal suspended from a cord in his hand. He put it about my neck, and accompanied me on my way as usual. When we came to the place where we were accustomed to separate, he turned to me and said, 'Every time you see this medal today, say your prayers to the Blessed Virgin.' That day I felt so full of fervor that I prayed from morning to evening. I was scarcely back at the monastery, when the young student came to meet me. With smiling face, he asked me to tell him all that I had done. And that time I succeeded in satisfying him. It was the last time I saw him. A few days later he took to his bed, and died shortly after."

Besides the ordinary rosary, Gabriel recited daily the chaplet of the Immaculate Conception and of the Seven Dolors, to which he added the *Stabat Mater.* Seven times every day, at appointed hours, he also recited the *Hail Mary* with his arms extended in the form of a cross. The month of September was particularly dear to him because the feast of Our Lady's Dolors occurs during it, and he always prepared himself for this feast by a special novena which he performed with unusual piety and recollection.

During Holy Week he was so filled with the spirit of Mary's sorrows that, we are informed by one of his companions, one would have thought he saw her with his own eyes, suffering with her Divine Son, so saddened was the expression on his countenance and so full of emotion were the very tones of his voice.

On the first day of each month, he prepared little tickets on each of which he inscribed one of the sorrows of Mary, with an appropriate quotation from some holy writer. These tickets were drawn by lot by his companions, and each one was supposed to honor, during the entire month, in a special manner

the particular sorrow inscribed on the card he had drawn.

When taking their walks on recreation days, the students were accustomed to enter the churches they passed on the way, for a little visit to the Blessed Sacrament. After they had paid their homage to the Eucharistic King, Gabriel would say to them: "Let us now present ourselves to the Queen": and if there was an image of Our Lady of Sorrows in the church, he would lead them to it, and recite with them his favorite prayer to the afflicted Mother:

"O Mother of Sorrows, by the anguish and love with which thou didst stand at the cross of Jesus, stand by me in my last agony. To thy maternal heart I commend the last three hours of my life. Offer these hours to the Eternal Father in union with the agony of our dearest Lord, in atonement for my sins. Offer to the Eternal Father the most precious blood of Jesus, mingled with your tears on Calvary, that I may obtain the grace of receiving Holy Communion with the most perfect love and contrition before my death, and that I may breathe forth my soul in the adorable presence of Jesus. Dearest Mother, when the moment

of my death has at last come, present me as your child to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive me for having offended Him, for I knew not what I did. Beg Him to receive me into His kingdom of glory to be united with Him forever. Amen."

Gabriel was very partial to beautiful and attractive pictures and statues of Mary. Those that were badly executed excited his indignation and he would exclaim, "Oh, my poor Mother, how they have disfigured you!" And then he would say, "A beautiful image is a treasure, because it fosters devotion, but an ugly one closes the heart to sentiments of piety and affection."

In a letter addressed to one of his cousins he writes:

"You will do me a great favor, should you see my brother Michael at Spoleto or at Rome, if you would remind him to take advantage of the opportunity he will have to send me two pictures of the Sacred Heart and of the Madonna, one picture of Our Lady of Sorrows, and another of the Crucifixion; but I should like them to be devotional and expressive. Do not forget to lay special stress on the words, *devotional* and *expressive*."

Shortly after going to Isola, he discovered in a neglected corner of the monastery, a statue of the Madonna which showed signs of long neglect. Immediately he set to work to restore it to freshness and beauty. He cleansed it of the dust that had accumulated upon it, reunited the broken parts, and then decorated it with tints so delicate and becoming that it appeared prettier even than it was originally. This statue is still preserved in the chapel at Isola, as a testimony to his love and devotion.

The ordinary subject of Gabriel's meditations was the sorrows of Mary, and in the contemplation of these, he experienced such delight that, having been asked by a fellow student, whether he had meditated that day on heaven, Gabriel replied: "My heaven is the heart of my Sorrowful Mother." Beside the time prescribed for the common meditation of the community, he would devote his spare moments to pondering over the affliction of Mary on Calvary. And he would suggest to his companions that they should do likewise:

"If we have any spare moments after we have discharged our prescribed duties we

ought to employ them in compassionating our loving Mother in her grief over the sufferings of her Son. In return, she will comfort and console us, and at the hour of death, will show us her sweet face and deliver us from all fear. She will take us under her protecting mantle, and with the sword that transpierced her most pure heart, will defend us against our enemy."

The letters he wrote are replete with references to Mary and her sorrows and with exhortations to practise devotion to her. Being the spontaneous outpourings of his heart, they express better than anything else, the real sentiments of his soul. A few selections may be taken as characteristics of Gabriel's wholehearted attachment to Mary.

My dear Father:

Do not be so anxious to hear from me, since I have a Mother who loves me and, in spite of my unworthiness, takes great care of me. Let us place a little more confidence in this tender Mother who declares her love for those who love her; 'I love those who love me'; and who says to us with Isaias: 'Can a mother forget her child so as not to have pity on the fruit of her womb? Though a mother should forget her child, I will never forget thee.'

Ah, how dearly we have cost her! Well, indeed, does she know with what sufferings and pains she received us on Calvary as her children. She accepted the charge when her well-beloved Son was pouring forth His blood, dying stretched upon the cross rather than see our souls lost forever. If we meditate for a few moments on this thought, oh! without doubt we shall love with a greater love that Mother who is so tender towards us.

We should have more confidence in her, and not fear the devil so much. Nay, more, when the devil attempts to intimidate us by his threats and terrors, our trust in the Most Holy Virgin will make us say: 'If Mary is for me, who will be against me?' It will not be God the Father, since Mary, in quality of His well-beloved daughter, will appease Him. It will not be Christ the Judge, since she as His Mother will incline Him to pardon us. It will not be our sins, for they will be blotted out in her presence from contact with her mercy. All hell will remain powerless, for satan flies and hell trembles with terror when I say *Hail Mary*. Lastly, we will not fear men, for according to the words of the Holy Ghost, the Most Holy Virgin is 'Strong as an army set in battle array.' Oh, if we give ourselves over completely to her, if we often

say to her: 'O my Queen, I place the defence of my cause in your hands, I place myself under your protection,' our sleep will be certainly more tranquil, our days happier; our life, in one word, will be a real heaven.

It is said of Mary that 'Every good comes with her.' If then, we have Mary with us, we have everything; everything is wanting to us if she is absent. If Mary protects us, we are saved; if she abandons us, we are lost. It is not I but the saints who speak thus.

Again he writes:

Dearest Father: I shall not forget to offer up my poor prayers to our Lord and the most Holy Virgin for the soul you have mentioned to me, as also for yourself and for the family, living and dead. Tell Henry and Cencio not to forget what they promised the Blessed Virgin, namely, to recite the Angelus every morning, noon and night. If they are in the streets, or anywhere else, let them not be ashamed to take off their hats. They will thus overcome human respect, and will certainly obtain the protection of that all-powerful Mother during this life, and at the hour of death.

I am delighted with the news you have given me of my four brothers. Give them my love when writing them. Remind them especially of the end they ought to have before them in their studies. Will you exhort them, for my sake, with true fatherly words (as you have always done) to have a true and unswerving devotion toward the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. Let them never go to rest without having honored a Mother so gracious and so merciful, by some act of devotion. O father dear, reading daily the lives of the saints, I see how a great number of them, tepid and sinful though they once were, became saints because they had, by some practice of devotion, won the favor of this tender Queen, always so ready to grant it to those who ask. How many have been snatched from the hands of the devil, thanks to the recital of the *Hail Mary,* the *Stabat Mater,* the rosary, or some other prayer.

Would that I had time to give you some instances.

To his favorite brother he writes:

My dear Michael:

I have not forgotten you in my poor prayers, but what use are they of themselves? Oh, I beg you by the love you

ought to have for your soul, never leave off, no, never—cost what it may—practising those acts of devotion toward the Blessed Virgin which you have marked out for yourself. It is with my whole heart and not without a particular inspiration, unless I am deceived, that I exhort you to offer this bouquet to Mary. If you do so, there is not the least doubt that you will receive a great reward.

At this time of the year, when the world blindly abandons itself to amusements and folly, can you not deprive yourself of something—some amusement—for the love of Jesus and Mary? When you feel disposed to perform these pious acts, you will say to yourself: I could amuse myself if I pleased; it is quite allowable; but I will deprive myself for the love of Jesus and Mary. Afterwards, go and make a short visit to an image of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Dearest brother, will you refuse me what I ask of you? Will you say: "No!" This mark of affection for which I beg, is the one I have most at heart, and I desire it with all the earnestness of my soul. Give it, dearest brother, and Jesus and Mary will be pleased.

To this same brother he writes again:

Dear Michael:

Would you have some one to love? Be it so, by all means. But whom shall you love? MARY! What creature is more beautiful, more lovable, more powerful? And do not imagine that to love, to speak and to live with Mary is wearisome and devoid of charm because she is not seen with bodily eyes. O no! The consolation, the delight of this love is so much the more pure and satisfying to the heart, as the soul is superior to the senses. Be assured, moreover, that you will meet none in this world who can make you entirely happy, for their love is inconstant or false. And were one to be found without these defects, the very thought of the parting that must come one day would fill the heart with bitterness and cruel pain. Not so with him who chooses Mary for his portion, for she is loving, faithful, constant and will never be outdone in love.

If we are in danger, she hastens to our rescue. If we are cast down, she consoles us. If we are sick, she comforts us. If we are in need, she runs to help us, with no thought of our past misdeeds. The moment she sees a heart that wishes to love her, she comes and reveals to it the secret of her goodness. She presses it to her bosom, she shields it, comforts it, stoops to serve it,

even deigns to keep it company on its way to eternity.

Then when the moment of death comes, O dearest brother, think of it, when for those who love creatures all is at an end and they must go hence into the eternal abode which they have fashioned for themselves, while they cry out with unutterable anguish and almost in despair: "O bitter and cruel death, is it thus thou tearest me away from all I have loved?"—at that hour true lovers of Mary are glad of heart. They invite death. They part without sorrow from their friends and the world, for they know that they are soon to possess the object of their love and that in her possession they will be happy for evermore.

Now, try to do what I tell you, and if you do not find out the truth of what I say, do not be afraid to tell me that I am wrong.

Go every day, both morning and evening, if you can, to visit some shrine of Mary, but go in preference to a church where the good Mother is least visited. Your presence will thus be all the more pleasing to her. Make a sacrifice to her of something you may have. Lay it at her feet in one of these visits. Deprive yourself, for love of her, of company or amusement which might be dangerous, or an occasion of sin. I beg you to say the rosary every day in her

honor; and when you feel inspired by her to make some sacrifice, make it at once with a good heart and have no fear that Mary will be outdone in generosity.

With all these evidences of his tender devotion to Mary before us, it is not difficult to understand how Father Norbert could say:

"His devotion to Mary, the Mother of Christ, was most extraordinary. He was so enamored of her that it is quite impossible for me to describe adequately the tenderness of his affection for her. He had taken as his rule in this matter the words of St. Bernard: 'Let Mary never be absent from your heart and lips.' His heart was aglow with intensest devotion to the Queen of Heaven, and his soul seemed to have been transformed, in some mysterious way, into Mary herself. He rejoiced exceedingly when he heard of any extraordinary honor shown her, or of any remarkable favor obtained through her intercession. And on the other hand, it grieved him to his very heart to learn that Mary had been slighted, or that devotion to her had been neglected.

"To him the dearest of all her titles was 'The Mother of Sorrows.' It was around Mary under this title that his entire spiritual life appeared to revolve. It was the

impetus to all his spiritual activities, for he was convinced that it was Mary the Mother of Sorrows who could bring him closest to Jesus Crucified."

Gabriel's remarkable devotion to Mary won for him from Leo XIII this encomium:

"Because of his filial love for Mary at the foot of the cross, he deserves to take his place by the side of St. John, the beloved disciple, to whom Jesus in His dying hour commended His mother."

The spirit of his deep affection for Mary still lingers about the little village of Isola. The shepherds and shepherdesses whom he taught to say his favorite prayers and sing his favorite hymns, have handed them down to their children and their children's children, so that even today, as they lead their flocks over the fields, and up the mountain sides they may be heard reciting the prayers and singing the hymns which Gabriel himself once prayed and sang, as he proclaimed the praises and the power of her to whom he had consecrated all the ardent love of his young and pure heart.

CHAPTER XV

SIMPLICITY OF HIS LIFE

THE perusal of the story of Gabriel's life thus far, must have impressed the reader with its singular uneventfulness, and the absence of those extraordinary signs which, somehow, one instinctively looks for in the life of a saint.

Throughout the whole history of his sanctity, one thing appears in bold emphasis, namely, that his life was one of striking simplicity. It was devoid of all those exceptional things which are usually associated with the popular idea of a saint. Hence those persons will be disappointed who expect to find in the account of his career, a record of glorious apparitions and of familiar converse with heavenly visitors; of ecstatic raptures and luminous revelations giving closer glimpses of obscure mysteries; of divine intuitions and prophetic warnings telling of events still enshrouded in the uncertainty of the future;

or of any of the other charisms which denote special gifts or powers bestowed by heaven.

Gabriel's was a life in which God quietly accomplished His designs without any of the exterior manifestations by which, not uncommonly, He indicates to men what is taking place in the soul of His elect, who have surrendered themselves entirely to the operations of divine grace. He made use of the common occurrences in the daily life of this simple religious and ecclesiastical student, to lift him to the highest altitudes of virtue. And thus, too, He has given us a fresh instance of the old truth that "God is wonderful in His saints."

Gabriel's was, what is called in the technique of asceticism, an interior life, or what St. Paul the Apostle terms, "A life hidden with Christ in God," and which, perhaps, is the best and most complete expression of the perfection of Christianity.

Subtracting the unusual fervor and fidelity with which he lived his entire religious life, and his wonderful devotion to Mary the Mother of Christ, there is hardly an incident in Gabriel's whole career that may be called extraordinary, in the sense we have intimated, except the manner in which he received his

vocation to the monastic life. That, indeed, was exceptional and even unique. It was in reality, however, only a special grace which God gave him in this singular way. The grace itself was not extraordinary, but only the manner in which it was communicated.

Graces no less special are bestowed by God daily on hundreds of young men and women in every department of the Church. Inviting them to come apart from the world and its pleasures, and live a life of evangelical perfection, God speaks to their souls just as pleadingly and imperatively as He did to Gabriel through the miraculous image of the Madonna of Spoleto. And sometimes even the manner in which He confers the grace is hardly less remarkable. And there are hundreds of youths and maidens who answer the call as promptly and obediently as did Gabriel.

Apart from this one exception then, his life, whether as a child, a boy, or a college youth, was like that of the ordinary child and boy and youth of the world today, save perhaps, that in him, signs of piety and virtue were not as evident and encouraging as they are in

many who may be known to the readers of these lines.

As a Passionist, his life ran on in the common channels familiar to the average religious. The routine of prayer and study and work followed by him, differed slightly, and that only in non-essentials, from the program, or horarium, of exercises established in most convents, monasteries and seminaries throughout the land. Not being a priest he did not have the powerfully sustaining and impelling graces that come from the celebration of daily Mass, the preaching of God's word, and the administration of the sacraments. The only means he possessed to mount to the great sanctity he acquired were those that are ready to the hands of every religious man and woman and ecclesiastical student.

Father Norbert was once asked if Gabriel had ever done anything extraordinary during his religious life. "No, nothing," he replied, "nothing extraordinary until, indeed, his last illness, when there were some signs of his supernatural gifts. No, he simply observed the rule with the utmost possible exactness, and loved Jesus and Mary with all his heart." And then he added: "And the reason why

there are so few saints now-a-days is that the rule is not well observed."

So, on the testimony of his director, who knew intimately and exactly every motion of his soul, and who was the closest observer of his external conduct, Gabriel's holiness consisted in the perfect observance of the simple but wonderfully sanctifying ordinances of the rule he had professed to follow. From the very moment when he entered the novitiate at Morrovale, until he closed his eyes in death at Isola, he yielded his entire being to its letter and its spirit, and conformed himself to it with conscientious exactitude and uniform consistency. If a doubt ever arose among his companions as to what was to be done in a given circumstance, Gabriel always had but one reply: "What does the rule say, or imply? That alone must be our guide."

Because the rule ordained that he should confide his spiritual welfare to the hands of his director, Gabriel made Father Norbert his sole confidant, and to no other did he commit the guardianship of his soul. Thus he avoided the confusion that frequently comes from having more than one spiritual guide, or no one in particular. With the

greatest simplicity, he bared his conscience to the eyes of that wise and prudent priest and scrupulously regulated his whole life in accordance with his counsels. Speaking of this Father Norbert says:

"He was most faithful in manifesting to me the secrets of his heart, and the greater the difficulty he experienced, the more courageously did he conquer it. Even when there was no necessity of conferring with me, he would come for the sole purpose of overcoming the reluctance he may have felt.

"He committed his whole soul into my hands: his thoughts, his desires, his temptations, his difficulties, his repugnances, so that his entire conduct, whether interior or exterior, might receive the direction of obedience. And it was sufficient for me to say just once, 'Conduct yourself in this, or that manner,' I was certain that he would do what I suggested, nor would there be any occasion for me to repeat my advice.

"In the manifestation of his heart, he acted with a simplicity and candor truly worthy of imitation. No child in his mother's arms, could be more tractable than this youth under the guidance of his superior. For him the voice of his director

was the voice of God, and the least manifestation of his will was equivalent to a command which he was eager to fulfil. Consequently, I had to be very careful in his presence not to show any desire or inclination, lest he should construe it as a command and think himself obliged to carry it out."

By these means the marvellous transformation and spiritualization of Gabriel's character were accomplished without excitement or display, and without unduly attracting the notice even of those who dwelt with him in the intimacy of daily life. They sensed, indeed, a mysterious something about him that indicated, unmistakably, unusual virtue and holiness, but it did not obtrude or impose itself upon them. Like those old, classic Greek vases which were moulded with such delicacy and were so thin and translucent that one could see, in a shadowy way, the treasure within them, so, too, the wonders God was effecting in Gabriel's soul could be observed to some extent but not in their completeness and full valuation.

That God intended to raise up Gabriel in His Church as a great hero of youthful holi-

ness, and in His providence, directed the events and graces of his life accordingly, no one will question. But even this design of God would have been frustrated, had not Gabriel freely and generously corresponded with the opportunities and inspirations given him; even as designs equally great have been defeated, more than once, by souls who have had graces no less special than those communicated to this young man.

This thought may have been in the mind of Father Bernard Mary of Jesus who, with deep humility, wrote of Gabriel:

> "The memory of his beautiful life lingers with me like the fragrance of some exquisite perfume, and many times has it produced within my soul, effects similar to those produced upon St. Bernard when he thought of the deceased monks whom he knew to have led very holy and virtuous lives. I wish to say that, many times, tears have come to my eyes and a blush of shame to my cheek, when I have thought how far removed I am from sanctity after so many years spent in the religious life, although this youth has acquired it in so short a time."

This saintly priest was a classmate of Gabriel, and his testimony to the virtues of his holy companion we have quoted many times in these pages. After being General of the Passionists for twenty-one years, he died in the odor of sanctity, and his grave is still visited by many of the faithful who claim to have received extraordinary favors through his intercession.

The beautiful simplicity of Gabriel's life illustrates very forcibly the old truth that, to become a saint, one need neither attempt nor achieve extraordinary things, nor even change his nature. As a great master of the spiritual life expresses it:

"One need only repair what is defective in one's nature. It suffices to remain in sanctifying grace, to refer all to God and His glory, by a pure intention, and thus to live one's life in the place assigned by Providence, in accomplishing the divine will, in doing the duty of the present moment, and that simply and peacefully, not feverishly and restlessly, but with the deep confidence that comes from liberty of soul and interior joy—of a child who knows himself to be loved by his father, and returns that love according to his power. Such a life of

sanctity, animated by grace and filled with love, does not always appear to the eyes of men. Its supernatural beauty is often veiled beneath the common appearances of daily life."

In these times of intense activity, when a person's worth is estimated largely by his ability as a financier, or his leadership in prominent business or social achievements, Gabriel's quiet, uneventful and hidden life may be judged by some to have been a rather selfish one—one lived for his own personal advantage, even though that advantage meant becoming a saint.

Those who may feel disposed to esteem his life thus, forget the deep meaning and broad truth of Tennyson's words: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." They forget that the really big things of life done for the uplift and welfare of humanity are not the result entirely of the great ideas and the splendid initiative of statesmen and money-getters and philanthropists.

It is only when one has fathomed the mysterious operations of divine grace, that one will be able to see that mightier things are done for the world through the prayers and

penances of silent recluses in their monastic cells, or of gentle nuns behind their cloister walls, than were ever done by merely human agencies. Only then will one see the catastrophies averted, the chastisements spared, the crimes prevented, the victories won, the sick healed, the truth spread, the souls saved, and the ten thousand other blessings effected through the secret influence of the graces sought and obtained by the obscure but sainted men and women leading lives of Christlike solitude, whose bodies and souls are consecrated to chastity and contemplation. Though unseen and unknown, these are the greatest factors in the world, whether to ward off evil, or to secure priceless benedictions.

When the annals of the world's real history, which God's angels have faithfully kept, are unfolded before men, then and then only, will they comprehend how supremely useful and unselfish was the life of Gabriel, and the unnumbered others who, like him, hid their lives with Christ in God.

CHAPTER XVI

HIS RESOLUTIONS

A SUMMARY of the high aspirations of Gabriel's soul toward perfect sanctity, may be found in the following resolutions, made during his student career and discovered among his notes after his death.

I will keep my rule, even the smallest; and I will not neglect any of my spiritual exercises. I will give to each its allotted time, and if unable to attend to it at the time prescribed, I will supply for it afterwards. Oh, how delightful it is to lay oneself down to rest with the consciousness of having served God, even though imperfectly, during the entire day!

Shun idleness; apply to study; labor for God; because this is not the time for rest but for work.

I will be punctual. I will obey the sound of the bell as though it were the voice of God.

I will receive all things from the hand of God, as being sent by Him for my own personal benefit. I will resign myself to all

things that happen, be they great or small, by whomsoever, or in what manner soever, they may come about. I will imagine Christ Himself saying to me: 'It is I who wish it to happen thus.' And I will say to Him: 'Thy will be done.'

I will profit by every occasion for mortification that may occur. I will fufil exactly my ordinary duties, mortifying self in whatever would prove an obstacle to perfect obedience.

I will mortify my eyes and my tongue.

I will not leave my cell without necessity.

I will not enquire after anything through curiosity.

I will check my desire to talk.

I will increase the number of such like acts daily.

I will not take any food outside of meal time. I will be content with what is served at the common table, without ever complaining either in thought or word, being mindful that I have made a vow of poverty. I am poor and I should act accordingly. The poor are frequently in want of things that are really necessary. I, too, should be willing to put up with any inconvenience gladly. If some poor people had all that I have they would think that every day was a feast-day. By the favor of Jesus and Mary, I have renounced all things and I could not be more contented than I am.

I will not eat with avidity, but rather with reserve and modesty, subjecting my appetite to reason.

I will mortify myself in ordinary things and in whatever I feel inclined to do, saying in my heart: "O my God, I will not do this thing through mere inclination, but because it is Thy will."

I will be reserved toward those to whom I feel most inclined, prudently avoiding their presence and conversation.

I will not utter a word that might, in the least, turn to my praise. I will not take pleasure in any praise bestowed upon me; on the contrary, I will despise it as though given to one who does not deserve it.

I will never excuse myself when I am blamed or corrected, nor even resent it interiorly, much less put the blame upon others.

I will never speak of the faults of others, even though they may be public: nor will I ever show want of esteem for others, whether in their presence or in their absence. I will speak of all with praise and commendation.

I will not judge ill of anyone. I will, on the contrary, show the good opinion I have of each one, by covering up his faults.

I will consider every one my superior, not merely in theory, but in practice, treating all with humility and reverence.

I will rejoice at the good done by others

and will deem it a fault to feel any sentiments of envy or jealousy; neither will I permit myself to become interested in vain and useless things.

I will rejoice at the success of others.

I will practise charity and kindness, assisting, serving and pleasing all. My answers shall be meek, my words mild, and my manners agreeable. I will shun entirely particular friendships, so as to offend no one.

I will avail myself with patience and alacrity of every opportunity for self-humiliation that presents itself. Every morning and evening I will practise some acts of humility, and gradually increase the number.

I will close my heart against disquiet of any kind; against sadness and moroseness, and much more against anything like aversion or retaliation.

I will suppress immediately all emotions of impetuosity and all affections that might cloud my mind, even lightly.

In what relates to obedience, I will be punctual. I will obey the voice of the superior and of the bell as if they were the voice of God Himself.

In my obedience I will examine neither the *why* nor the *wherefore*. I will conform my judgment to that of my superior, reflecting that for me his order is from God, and I will say: "I obey, O Lord, because it is Thy will."

It is useless to employ time in conversing about purely worldly matters. Even if it did no other harm, it usually occasions distraction at prayer. Time spent in talking about such things is time squandered.

"Faithfulness in little things" is the motto I will always follow in my efforts to reach holiness.

I will try to reproduce in my own conduct whatever I see edifying and virtuous in the conduct of my companions.

In giving me my vocation, God has bestowed upon me one of His best graces. I will give to Him the best that I have in return —the entire affection of my heart.

A person's resolutions may be regarded as the expression of his individuality. They reflect the fineness of his character and the delicacy of his sense of righteousness. They are the impulses that give him control over himself and unify the energies of his being toward the attainment of noble ends.

No one of the foregoing resolutions made by Confrater Gabriel is very big and heroic in itself. They do not propose severe austerities, nor great enterprises to be attempted for the glory of God or the good of humanity; nor do they aim at eagle flights toward those

sublime peaks of sanctity where deep mystics and enraptured contemplatives dwell in serene unconcern of what is happening on the plains far below. They all point to just one thing—the control of self. And self-control is the mightiest of conquests and the noblest of heroisms. It is the essence of all holiness, and the very pith of Christ's evangelical perfection.

Anyone who would comprehend the courage of soul, the pertinacity of will and the discipline of self entailed in acting out these resolutions, need but select any one of them and try to abide by it uniformly and consistently, day by day, just for a month or two. He will soon discover that beneath the mere verbal statement, there was in these resolutions of Gabriel, a heroism and self-mastery nothing less than amazing and gigantic. He will appreciate the superlative excellence of his ideals, and the masterly control which this youth, scarcely out of his teens, exercised over his whole nature; a nature, too, that was not inert and phlegmatic, but intensely active and vehemently impetuous.

Making resolutions is one thing; keeping them is quite another. Gabriel not only made

the resolutions we have recorded, but he also kept them in their letter and their spirit. Father Norbert witnesses to this in the following words:

"I first met Confrater Gabriel on the day he entered the novitiate at Morrovale, and from that moment we were never separated until the day of his death. During all that time he lived constantly under my direction. Only a few times, during my absence, did he go to confession to any other priest, and I do not think that he ever held a spiritual conference with any one else. Consequently, I have been the eye-witness of his whole religious life, and I was entrusted with all the secrets of his heart. I knew all that passed in his mind, and was acquainted with all the movements and occupations of his beautiful soul. Nothing was hidden from me.

"Frequently and attentively, have I considered the life of this youth and I have asked myself whether there was any virtue belonging to his state that did not shine forth in him, and whether it would have been possible to desire anything more excellent than the manner in which he practised those virtues: and invariably I was obliged to answer in the negative. I discovered also that some of his companions had

put the same questions to themselves, and that they, too, had reached a like conclusion. Such was his hunger and thirst for all virtues, such the assiduity with which he labored to acquire them, that he never lost an opportunity for practising them. Rather, he studiously sought for such opportunities and was very clever in finding them, even in things quite indifferent.

"Truly it may be said that he lived on virtue, and existed for the sole purpose of acquiring it."

CHAPTER XVII

LAST DAYS OF HIS LIFE

FOR three years Confrater Gabriel thus lived his student life at Isola del Gran Sasso, breathing his every breath in the atmosphere of the supernatural world and with only two ambitions in his heart—to become a saint and to become a priest. His ambition to become a saint was to be realized. His ambition to become a priest was to be defeated.

Just as the gates of the sanctuary had opened to admit him to the holy altar, he was halted at the very steps and denied ascent. And it was God Himself who stood in the way thwarting the fond hopes of this young and ardent Levite. God stood there to demand from him the last and the greatest sacrifice of himself—the sacrifice that was to perfect the complete detachment of his heart from everything on earth; the sacrifice of the one thing among all others in which he might take,

legitimately and laudably, any human satisfaction—the holy priesthood itself.

On the twenty-fifth of May, 1861, Gabriel received the sacred tonsure and four minor orders of the Church, in the Cathedral of Penne, from the hands of Monsignor Vincenzo d'Alfonso, Bishop of that diocese. At the same time, arrangements were made that he should be raised to the subdiaconate at the ember days of the following September. The diaconate and the priesthood were to follow at Christmas time. This arrangement we learn from a letter written by Gabriel to his father shortly after his reception of minor orders.

About this time, the political disturbances that were menacing Italy under the leadership of Victor Emmanuel and his Piedmont revolutionaries, had made their way into the kingdom of Naples, to which Isola belonged. The crimes and depredations consequent upon war, soon extended even to the remotest towns and villages. The mountains and less protected places became infested with brigands and banditti, whose violent attacks upon life and property held the inhabitants in constant terror. The highway leading

from Isola to Penne was long and tortuous and it lay through the most dangerous districts. A journey between the two places, which, in the absence of railways, had to be performed on horse-back, or by stage coach, was very hazardous and left the traveller exposed to perils of every kind. It was deemed prudent, therefore, when the time for Gabriel's ordination approached, to defer it until peace was restored, or more favorable conditions prevailed.

Gabriel's disappointment was keen, but he accepted it with his usual cheerfulness and resignation. Writing to his father he said: "At this hour, perhaps, I should be a priest, were it not that the ordination was postponed, thus leaving me now with only minor orders. But God has so willed. And as He wills, so do I."

When conditions had improved, the deferred ordination took place, but Gabriel was not with his class mates. God had called him to Himself, and had numbered him among the acolytes who minister at the throne of the Lamb for evermore.

During the early summer of 1857, while at Pievetorina, Gabriel contracted a severe cold,

which affected his throat and bronchial organs. The attending physician regarded the ailment rather lightly and treated it as a slight catarrhal condition. The congestion and irritation, however, refused to yield to the medicines prescribed; and when, two months later, Gabriel left Pievetorina for Isola, the malady had not improved.

The dry, mountain air of Isola seemed to correct it for a while, but the improvement was only apparent. Although he continued at his studies with unabated diligence and complied exactly with every point of his religious rule, without any evident detriment to his health, still slowly and imperceptibly, the disease worked its ravages until, about two years later, it had so undermined his constitution, that his strength suddenly collapsed, and he declined rapidly into complete debility. Then it was discovered that the disease had attacked his lungs, and the physician pronounced it pulmonary tuberculosis. Father Norbert was dismayed at the discovery and immediately adopted every available means to check the progress of the malady and to restore his disciple to health. Gabriel was dispensed from all acts of the community life

that might tax his strength and further study and application were forbidden him. Heaven, too, was stormed with prayers that God would spare the life of one so young and full of promise.

The only one who showed no signs of alarm or disquietude was Gabriel himself. He even manifested surprise that Father Norbert and the other members of the community should be so distressed over what appeared to him to be no occasion for anxiety whatever.

In those times, when medical science was unacquainted with the methods now employed with such success for the arrest and cure of tuberculosis, the disease was commonly regarded as fatal and, consequently, when a person was informed that he had fallen a victim to it, it was equivalent to a death sentence. Gabriel, however, heard the physician's diagnosis with a calmness and serenity that were inexplicable to any one who did not know the supernatural view he took of every occurrence and his complete detachment from self. So undisturbed was his whole demeanor that his fellow-students were of the opinion that he must have had, for a long time previous, some prophetic assurance

that he was to die of this malady and accordingly, had awaited its approach with pleasureful expectation. The fact is that, acting under the impulse of what seemed a kind of divine intuition, he had prayed from the first days of his religious life that God might be pleased to send him this disease and now that his prayer was answered, his soul was glad and rejoiced with extraordinary gratitude. It was a strange prayer indeed, and one which only an heroic soul could have the courage to make.

Most people shrink back in dread and horror from this disease which accomplishes its ravages so subtly and relentlessly. They are appalled at the thought of the long weeks and months during which death disguises himself under the mask of beguiling hope or starts up ever and anon, like a threatening ghost, terrifying with his close approach, only to recede again, and repeat once more, his gruesome antics with more desperate boldness.

Gabriel, however, took a quite different view. To him it was what the Italian proverb calls it, 'the disease of the blessed.' The very slowness with which it consumes the life

energies of its victim, attracted him with a kind of fascination, because it would give him ample time to make immediate preparation for an event that was to realize one of the great desires of his soul—the termination of his exile upon earth and the beginning of an endless life of perfect happiness in the brightest of homes, with the tenderest of fathers and among the truest of friends. Every day that passed while he awaited the welcome summons, meant to him simply multiplied opportunities for practising acts of patience and resignation, which would give him a place nearer to God and set new jewels in the crown of glory he would wear forever as a prince of God's kingdom. He felt that the long and close familiarity with death kept by this disease, would make of that grim specter a not unpleasant companion through the dark valley which lies between time and eternity. The fact, too, that this disease usually leaves the mental faculties unimpaired until the end, delighted his heart, for being conscious until the last moment, he could hope to utter his *"Consummatum est"* with such an act of faith and trust and love as would carry his soul into

the hands of his Maker with the most perfect of Christian dispositions.

With these thoughts and sentiments pervading his mind and heart, he welcomed the going and coming of each day, as the voyager on the high seas rejoices over the passing of the day that brings him nearer and nearer still to the journey's end. Although he was fully persuaded that the remedies prescribed for his recovery would be of no avail, still he complied scrupulously with every direction of the physician.

At first, he felt keen regret over being obliged to omit some of the exercises of the community, because he thought that he would be deprived of the twofold reward which attaches to every act of the religious life—the reward of the good act itself, and the superadded reward of the virtue of religion. Fearing that there might be some secret, selfish motive beneath this regret, he repented of it and succeeded in banishing even that feeling from his heart.

It has ever been the way of God to test and purify his elect ones in the crucible of suffering, especially when the end of life is drawing near; for "Pain pays the income of each

precious thing." And He made no exception of Gabriel.

There were hours during those weeks and months of lingering illness, when his poor body was racked with intense suffering and his soul had its Gethsemani of bitterness and desolation. The fever which slowly consumed his vitality, left him so prostrate at times that he was unable even to change his position and the frequent attacks of severe and prolonged coughing so irritated his nerves that darts of pain, like sword thrusts, penetrated to every part of his chest and head. His physical depression reacted upon his soul, leaving him sometimes spiritually dejected and disconsolate. Subtle temptations, too, against faith and trust in God besieged him, to repel which demanded the full exercise of all the strength of his will.

Thus "the Lord sat refining and cleansing the silver" until He saw that no dross remained to be destroyed, and He beheld His own divine image mirrored in the beautiful shining of this purified and perfected soul.

Throughout all the test, Gabriel maintained his self-control and never once faltered

in the poise of soul he had acquired. Not once did he repine; never did any sign of impatience cross his features; never did he seek for even a word of sympathy. Indeed, so well did he conceal his bodily sufferings and mental anguish under the appearance of genuine cheerfulness, and even joviality, that his little cell became a rendezvous where his fellow-students loved to gather to listen to his pleasantries, and to be edified by the uniform sweetness and tranquillity of his manner. They would vie with one another in inducing Father Norbert to appoint them to remain with him. As one of them said:

> "The warm graciousness of his manners was like a strong magnet drawing his religious brethren to his bedside, and holding them there so that they were unwilling to leave. It was something more than fraternal charity that made them anxious to wait on him. The real reason was the saintly joyousness of the invalid's disposition, which like sunshine warmed and cheered all who came to visit him. His body was attenuated and emaciated by his lingering illness, but the happiness of his soul seemed to increase as his bodily strength declined."

Gabriel felt embarrassed because of all the delicate attentions bestowed upon him, and on one occasion he remarked to his Director: "The care and courtesy and kindness heaped upon me during this sickness are more than would be given a prince. O dear God, how shall I be able to repay it! Oh, the sweet charity that reigns in religion! How it touches and confuses me!"

If any one of the religious had remained up with him during the night, he insisted that he should rest during the day. If the brother insisted that he could not sleep in the day time, Gabriel would reply: "Well, won't you please try." And then turning to Father Norbert he would say playfully: "Father, make a trial of his obedience and oblige him to sleep." He would request, too, that in the morning they should have something special for breakfast.

"How can I show my appreciation for all that you have done for me?" he said one evening to a companion who was attending him. The student answered: "Oh, just recommend me to your dear Madonna." Clasping his favorite image of Mary, Gabriel said with great tenderness: "O my dear Mother, you

will not forget to reward this good student who has been so kind to me. Obtain for him whatever graces he may need, whether for soul or body."

And so the days of his illness passed on in patient suffering, in silent resignation, in serene cheerfulness, and above all, in closer union with God through acts of fervent love and humble self-renunciation. Speaking of him at this time, Father Norbert says: "Such was the abundance of graces God imparted to him, and such his faithful response to them, that he became to me an object of wonder and admiration. A kind of sublime majesty seemed to enhance his spiritual life, so that a feeling of veneration for him took hold of me."

As death stole closer, and closer still, upon him, he greeted its approach with ever increasing joy and satisfaction. One day Father Norbert suggested that he make a final appeal to his special patroness, Our Lady of Sorrows, to restore him to health. "O Father," replied Gabriel, "rather let me ask for a good and holy death, because the dangers of offending God are so many."

Speaking to one of his companions concern-

ing his approaching death, he said: "Do you want me to tell you how I feel about it? Well, I assure you that I am not the least dismayed at the thought of leaving this world. Rather, I fear there may be some self-love in the pleasure I experience at the thought of death."

In a periodical called *Science and Faith,* he found a richly indulgenced prayer for a happy death. This he carefully copied on a little card and recited daily, each recitation bringing him more and more comfort and interior peace.

About the middle of February, he was taken with a violent hemorrhage. It left him so prostrate that the physician advised the administration of the last sacraments. Gabriel had made a general confession of his entire life a little while before, and had received Holy Communion almost daily for many months previous. Therefore he was quite prepared for the reception of the last rites of the Church. The eagerness with which he had looked forward to death for so long a time, had taken away from his soul the apprehension which even the most courageous will feel at the thought of going out all alone

into the unknown and mysterious eternity. Hence, the announcement that Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction were to be administered to him, occasioned no feelings of fear or anxiety, but only a joy so exuberant that his confessor advised him to restrain it. He asked to be clothed with his holy habit, so as to receive the last sacraments in that religious garb which meant more to him than all the world, and which was the pledge of the unreserved consecration with which he had devoted himself to the service of God.

As the habit was rough and heavy, it was feared that its weight would be too much for his weakened condition and so his request was denied. But to satisfy his desire to some extent, the habit was placed beside him on his bed. Placing his hands upon it, he caressed it tenderly, saying, "Oh, I am so sorry! I wanted to have the consolation of dying in thee, but obedience will not permit me. Forgive me, forgive me!"

When the Blessed Sacrament was carried to his cell, accompanied by all the religious, bearing lighted tapers, he made an effort to rise from his couch and kneel, thus to meet his Sacramental King in a posture of lowly

reverence and adoration. But he was prevented by the infirmarian, who whispered to him that the Good Jesus did not wish him to do that. Obediently he composed himself and then saluted his Eucharistic Lord with aspirations of profoundest humility and tenderest love.

Turning to the religious kneeling around his bed, he struck his breast penitently and implored their forgiveness for any offence or disedification he had ever given them. Once more fixing his eyes upon the Sacred Host as Father Norbert held It before him, he made an act of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, supplicated the Divine Majesty to pardon every fault he had ever committed, and then with an aspiration aflame with the love that burned within his heart, he received Holy Viaticum.

Closing his eyes and folding his hands over his breast, he seemed for several minutes to be rapt into an ecstasy of celestial delight.

When Father Norbert proceeded to administer the Sacred Unction, Gabriel opened his eyes and with a smile about his lips, responded to all the prayers. As each sense was anointed, the interior joy and devotion he experienced

were reflected upon his features. The entire ceremony seemed more like a joyful celebration of some holy feast than the solemn recommendation of a departing soul.

Shortly after this, Gabriel called Father Norbert and said to him: "Father, I have kept in a litle book, which you will find in my desk, the record of all the graces God has given me through the hands of Most Holy Mary. I am afraid that the evil one may tempt me to presumption, or vain-glory, because of these special favors. Therefore, I request you to take that little book and never show it to any one." The priest immediately went to the desk, and discovered the book. He destroyed it before the eyes of the sick youth without even opening it himself. It was a misfortune, indeed, that that record was not preserved, for, doubtless, it would have given us an insight into his spiritual life that must now remain concealed until the day when the Lord Himself shall manifest His just ones in all the splendor of their wondrous sanctity.

After Gabriel had received the last sacraments his strength rallied somewhat and the imminent danger of death passed away.

It was only for a few days, however. Late in the evening of February 26, he began to fail rapidly, and it became evident that the end was not far distant. Father Norbert, who alone had been the custodian of his conscience and knew best the secrets of his soul, remained at his side all through the night, to give spiritual comfort and succor in those last and decisive hours.

Again, Christ in the Holy Viaticum, was brought to him to be his companion on the way he was to traverse so soon.

During the lingering hours of the night, Gabriel kept his crucifix and beloved image of Our Lady of Sorrows, clasped close to his heart, never once relinquishing his firm hold upon them. Almost continuously, he repeated the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the other pious ejaculations he had loved to recite. "O my dear Jesus, love for love, suffering for suffering, blood for blood. Thy wounds are my hope and salvation. O Mary, my sweetest Mother, thou knowest that I love thee, and that I belong to thee."

Occasionally he would whisper into the ears of his confessor the thoughts and emotions thronging his mind and heart, and more

than once, Father Norbert raised his hand in absolution over him, signing him with the saving sign of the cross.

At last the end came. The angel of death quietly entered his cell and bore his soul aloft, presenting it, in all its beauty and loveliness, to the God he had loved and served so well, and who was waiting to crown it with the diadem of His sainted ones who are to reign with Him for evermore.

This happened on the morning of the twenty-seventh of February, 1862, in the twenty-fourth year of Gabriel's age, and the sixth of his religious life as a Passionist.

In accordance with the usage of the Passionists, the body of the deceased was clothed with the black, penitential habit of the community. The crucifix which had been given him on the day when he first vowed himself to God in the novitiate at Morrovale, was placed in his hands folded over his breast. The corpse was then placed upon a plain, rough board, and the head sprinkled with ashes and resting upon a few bricks. At the twilight hour, it was carried in procession to the little church, while the religious chanted the plaintive dirge of the *Miserere* and the *De*

Profundis. The following day the solemn funeral services were performed, and the remains were laid to rest in the vault near the entrance to the church.

The next day Father Norbert sent the following obituary letter to all the monasteries of the Passionists:

"On the morning of February 27, Confrater Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, died in this retreat of Isola. He was born at Assisi, on the first day of March, 1838, and was called Francis Possenti. He was clothed with the habit of our Congregation on the twenty-first of September, 1856, and was professed with his holy vows on the twenty-second of the same month, in the following year. His death was caused by pulmonary tuberculosis.

"The life of this lamented youth was one of uninterrupted progress in perfection. He was always most assiduous in fulfilling all his obligations. He was charitable to all, humble, patient and mortified. He carried his recollection to such a point as not to suffer a distraction during all the time of the divine office and of prayer. Hungering for the Eucharistic Food, he eagerly longed to receive It daily into his breast. But the most characteristic virtue of the departed

youth was a fervent devotion to Most Holy Mary, and especially toward her sorrows. His conversation always centered around her and great was the unction with which he spoke of her.

"In the last part of his life, being assaulted at diverse times by hell, he gained a triumphant victory by pronouncing the holy name of Mary. Without agony he breathed forth his soul peacefully into the hands of the Lord, assisted by the last sacraments and the prayers of the religious. Your prayers are requested for the happy repose of his soul."

CHAPTER XVIII

HIS REPUTATION FOR SANCTITY

IN 1866, four years after Gabriel's death, the religious of the community at Isola were compelled to quit the monastery where he had lived and died, and where his blessed remains reposed as a sacred treasure.

Victor Emmanuel's new government of a United Italy which, gradually, was usurping possession of the entire country, had inaugurated its reign of so-called "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality" by enacting laws for the suppression of the religious orders and for the confiscation of their property. The poverty of the small and unpretentious convent of the Passionists, high up in the desolate mountains of Isola, offered no spoils to the legalized plunderers who seized it. Nevertheless, being the Passionists were religious, they were compelled to submit to the ordinance which decreed expulsion from their retreat of prayer and penance. Accordingly, they were ejected

by force and were obliged to seek shelter in the homes of their relatives, or wherever charity offered them hospitality.

During the four years immediately following Gabriel's death, the memory of his saintly life had continued undimmed among those who had been associated with him, and the fragrance of his virtues seemed to linger in the chapel, along the corridors and under the arches of the old monastery, as though his unseen presence were still there. Hardly a day passed by on which he was not made the topic of conversation and Father Norbert was kept busy recounting the acts of humility, self-denial, charity and piety that had made his youthful disciple so Christ-like.

A subtle, indescribable something seemed to pervade the house and gardens, giving inspiration to all to "go and do in like manner"; to model their conduct after him who "being made perfect in a short space, fulfilled a long time." His very grave became a cherished spot where the members of the community loved to visit, and where they would meditate upon the beauty and simplicity of his singularly attractive and impressive life. Frequently they would go to the vault containing

his body, in order to enjoy the consolation of being close to the "dear little saint," as they affectionately and familiarly called him.

This love and reverence which they entertained for their departed brother, soon spread beyond the cloister walls to the peasants of the adjacent village and the surrounding country. And although these simple country folk had not known Gabriel, except for the occasional glimpses they caught of him while he assisted at the services in the church, or as he strolled along the roads or through the fields with his fellow students on days of recreation, somehow they had sensed the sanctity concealed about his person; and now, moved by some deep intuition, they, too, gathered round his tomb to kneel and pray.

When the religious were dispersed, they were forced to confide the grave of Gabriel to the care of Divine Providence and the pious villagers of Isola. His memory, however, they carried with them, and wherever they went, the story of his guileless and holy life was told. Thus, his name and reputation soon spread far and wide and he came to be held in veneration wherever the exiled Passionists found their way.

Two years after the expulsion, two of the priests were recalled by the local officials to take care of the church and to act as its chaplains. Gladly, indeed, did they return to their former home and to the guardianship of Gabriel's tomb. On their return they found that the people of Isola had not forgotten their little saint and that still they visited the resting place of his mortal remains.

In 1880, the General of the Passionists succeeded in arranging with the civil authorities of the district that the dispersed religious might return to their monastery. Accordingly, the community was re-established, and the regular monastic life resumed. Once more the chant of psalms re-echoed through the cloister walls, and the black-robed and sandalled monks were seen at their labors and on their errands of mercy and helpfulness. This happy state, however, was short-lived. It continued only two years. Some persons, ill-disposed toward religion and anxious to curry favor with certain state officials, known to be especially hostile toward the Church and the religious orders, reported to the government authorities at Naples that the monks were back at their prayers and penances and

studies and charities, and demanded that the decree forbidding them to live in community life be enforced. Straightway, the wrath of these guardians of the law, who proclaimed themselves the defenders of personal liberty and individual rights, was let loose upon the supposedly offending monks, and once more they were compelled to leave their peaceful sanctuary and to become exiles through the land. For the next ten years the monastery remained desolate and uninhabited and Gabriel's grave was again in the hands of strangers.

In the late summer of 1892, Father Francis Xavier who had recently been elected General of the Passionists, a classmate of Gabriel, and an enthusiastic admirer of his virtuous life, conceived the idea of presenting his saintly companion to the Holy See as a candidate for beatification.

The first step necessary in this project was to recover and identify his body. As there was no human hope of regaining possession of the monastery at Isola, where the body was interred, Father Francis planned to have the remains exhumed secretly and transferred to a more suitable place. A commission was

appointed by the ecclesiastical authorities to assist at the exhumation and to certify to the identity of the body. The whole plan was guarded with the utmost secrecy, lest the civil powers might interfere and forbid its execution.

On the morning of October 17, the members of the commission repaired to the church to carry out their design. Father Norbert was of their number. Thirty years had elapsed since he had laid to rest the body of his young disciple and though time had wrought many a change upon him, it had left unimpaired the love and veneration he cherished for the holy youth. His heart now thrilled with intense delight because he was about to gaze once more upon Gabriel's blessed remains. On their way through the village, the commissioners observed large numbers of peasants, dressed in gala attire, hastening along the roads and across the fields toward the monastery; and on reaching the entrance to the church, they found it barricaded with hundreds of excited men and women who dared them, with threatening words and gestures, to touch the tomb of their saint.

The members of the commission were astonished at this demonstration and were at a loss to account for it, because every precaution had been taken that no one should know of their plan. They enquired who had given the information that they were come to take away the body of the saint, but no one could or would reply. The only answer they received from the people to all their questionings, was that they did not know how they had come together; and that they would not give up the body of their little saint. An air of mystery enshrouded the whole affair and it was the common opinion that, in some inscrutable way, God's Providence had assembled these people to witness to the public esteem in which Gabriel's sanctity was held.

It was an embarrassing predicament for the commissioners to be in, and it required no little tact and diplomacy to dissuade the crowds from their determination. One of the commissioners explained that they were desirous of having Gabriel elevated to the honors of the altar, and that one of the requisite preliminaries was the identification of his body. On hearing that their little saint was to be enrolled as a candidate for the highest

honors of the Church, the people became more favorably disposed and a compromise was agreed upon. It was settled that the body might be exhumed and formally identified, but that it must not be removed from Isola. To insure that this agreement would be faithfully observed, a number of delegates from among the people were chosen to assist at the ceremony. One of the ecclesiastical officials present on that occasion described what occurred that day as follows:

"It was the seventeenth of October; and though the day and hour set for the exhumation had been kept a strict secret from all, except the members of the commission, still a great concourse of people assembled as though they had been urged to attend one of the solemn festivals of the Church. Although it was the busiest time of the harvest, they dropped their work, and came from afar and near. Garbed in festive dress, they hastened toward the abandoned sanctuary, singing joyous hymns as they went. Every path leading to the hill on which the old monastery stood, was thronged with devout pilgrims, as were also the precincts of the church.

"In vain was every effort made to per-

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suade them to leave so that the disinterment might take place, and so great was the resistance manifested, that it was deemed imprudent to attempt to overcome it. 'We have come here,' they declared, 'to defend what is our own, and we will not depart until we are assured that the remains of our saint will not be taken away.' No matter to what artifices the commissioners had recourse in order to get possession of the body, they were foiled at every attempt. The church was well guarded at every angle by hundreds of men and women, prepared to oppose with all their might every effort to remove the body.

"Seeing that it was impossible to prevail upon the crowds to depart, it was proposed that representatives of the people from each village present should be selected to act as witnesses to the exhuming of the holy youth's body, and to see that it should not be taken away. After considerable parleying, this plan was accepted and accordingly, some two or three hundred were chosen to remain in the church, while all the others were excluded.

"When the vault was opened, the body of the Servant of God was found to be in the same position as that in which it had been buried thirty years before. All that remained were his bones, the leathern girdle

and the emblem of the Sacred Passion he had worn over his heart.

"The relics were lifted tenderly from the vault, and with the aid of two skilful physicians, the parts were arranged in anatomical position upon a linen pall. The legal recognition was then made, and the authentic documents drawn up and signed, certifying that all the prescribed formalities had been complied with exactly. The remains were then enclosed in a double casket, which was sealed with the official seals of the bishop of the diocese and of the commission.

"The doors of the church were then thrown open to the expectant crowd which had been waiting outside for several hours. With exclamations of joy and pious invocations, they rushed into the church and gathered round the casket. They touched it, kissed it, wept tears of joy over it, and strewed it with flowers which, afterwards, they carried away with them as priceless souvenirs. They gathered up the very dust from his grave and preserved it as a sacred treasure, even as the early Christians gathered up the ground consecrated with the blood of the martyrs. Those who, because of the great crowd, could not get close to the casket, or even into the church, sang hymns of praise and gratitude to God and Our Blessed Lady.

"Surely, it must have been God Himself who spoke to these faithful people, and who moved them to so unique a demonstration of piety. Beholding this spectacle of so many men and women filled with such devotion, and the eyes of all wet with tears, I myself was stirred to the deepest depths of my soul and I exclaimed: 'Truly God is wonderful in His saints.' No less surprising to me was the order and decorum displayed on this occasion. Although there was so large a crowd in so small a church, and the people were overcome with emotions of faith, piety and devotion, still there was no confusion or disturbance. Not one word was spoken, nor one deed done, that was unbecoming a place of public prayer."

The same scene was repeated the following day when the commission returned to place the casket in the new crypt prepared for it in the little chapel of St. Paul of the Cross, Founder of the Passionists, which was part of the church. The crypt was very plain and modest. A simple marble slab bearing the following inscription was placed over it.

CORPUS SERVI DEI GABRIELIS A VIRGINE
DOLOROSA CONGREGATIONIS PASSIONIS D. N. J. C.,
CLERICI PROFESSI HEIC DEPOSITUM
XV KAL. NOV. MDCCCXCII.
ANNIS AB OBITU XXX.

(The body of the Servant of God Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin professed cleric of the Congregation of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, was interred in this place on the 18th of October, 1892, in the thirtieth year after his death.)

Father Germanus, a learned and experienced Passionist from Rome, had been appointed officially to supervise all the proceedings for the introduction of Gabriel's cause for beatification. He remained at Isola for some days after the body had been identified and reinterred in its new resting place.

On the second day of his sojourn in the little village, he was invited to visit a young woman, twenty years of age, Maria Mazzarella by name, who had been very ill for almost three years and of whose recovery the attending physicians had quite despaired. She was suffering from a complication of diseases

which affected her lungs and stomach and spine. There were six ulcerous wounds on her body, which permitted her no rest, whether by day or night. It was almost impossible for her to take even the smallest quantity of food and she had become so weakened that not only was she unable to remain out of bed but she was unable even to speak or to bear the light of day. Father Germanus himself tells us that he was filled with horror when he saw her and that she appeared like a corpse, except for her painful and almost imperceptible breathing; and that he then said if she were cured, it would be a miracle like the raising of Lazarus from the grave.

Seeing that she could hope for no cure from medical science, in her deep distress she turned to heaven and pleaded with Mary, the Mother of Christ, to obtain at least the alleviation of her sufferings. Shortly after making this prayer she fell asleep and saw in a dream a wondrously beautiful woman who told her that if she would go to the tomb of Gabriel, she would be cured. On awakening Maria felt greatly consoled and comforted and telling her dream to her father, begged him to carry her to Gabriel's grave. The father

hesitated about complying with her request, and consulted with Father Germanus. The prudent priest gave no credence to the dream and dissuaded the parent from subjecting his daughter to a journey that might hasten her death; if the Blessed Virgin wished to cure her, he averred, she could do so without the journey being made. What followed the young woman herself related in these words:

"Father Germanus came to visit me on the morning of October 20. He placed about my neck a crucifix which had been used by Gabriel and put upon me the leathern girdle which he had worn, and which was found in his grave. The good priest comforted me very much and bade me have great confidence in Gabriel's intercession with God. He told me to make a vow that I would journey to Gabriel's tomb barefoot if I should be cured; and for three days consecutively fervently to supplicate the assistance of his prayers with God. Though I prayed to the holy youth with all the earnestness of my soul, my pains were not alleviated. The three days of prayer were to end on Sunday, October 23. On Saturday evening I felt much worse than usual, and the members of my family were greatly discouraged. Toward dawn on Sunday

morning, I turned to my sister and asked her to say the litany with me. While we were reciting it, I fell into a peaceful slumber. When I awoke, an indescribable joy overwhelmed me and I felt that I was cured. I made an effort to rise from my bed, and to my great astonishment I discovered that my strength had suddenly returned, and that the ulcers had been completely healed. Exultant with happiness, I cried out, 'Sister, get up! I am cured! The holy Gabriel has obtained a miracle for me!'

"For eight months I had not been able to do anything for myself, but that morning I arose, clothed myself, and went to the kitchen where my parents were seated. My sister was dumbfounded. She remained close to me all the time fearing that I was deluded. When I appeared before my father and mother and the servant maid in the kitchen they were mute with astonishment. 'Mother,' I said, 'do not be afraid. The holy Gabriel has cured me.' And to assure her that my words were true, I lifted the baby from her arms and held it in mine."

Overcome with joy and gratitude, the young woman's father ran out into the streets and proclaimed to the neighbors the miracle that had been performed upon his daughter.

These quickly gathered around her, and seeing with their own eyes the wonder that had come to pass, united in praising and thanking God for so extraordinary a favor obtained through the intercession of His holy servant Gabriel. They all hastened to the parish church, where a Mass of thanksgiving was celebrated and the girl received Holy Communion.

On October 25, with all the members of her family she went barefoot to the crypt containing Gabriel's bones, thus fulfilling the vow she had made. It was a distance of about five miles, and large numbers of the people of the village accompanied her, marvelling at the wonder that had been done in their very midst by their Gabriel, whose saintly virtues they had been taught to admire and whose grave they had guarded so jealously for so many years. He became all the dearer to them now, since God Himself, by this miracle, had placed the seal of His own approval upon his virtues and sanctity.

This was the first of the many wonders wrought through the intercession of Gabriel. Its fame spread rapidly to every quarter, and soon the grave became a place of pilgrimage

where the afflicted congregated in thousands to seek the help of the young Passionist student who, just thirty years before, had died almost unknown except within the walls of his own monastery in the lonely mountains of Isola.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CHURCH'S TEST OF HIS VIRTUES

WHEN Gabriel was presented to the Holy See as a candidate for the honors of the altar, it meant that the Church was supplicated to bestow upon him the very highest dignity it is in her power to confer.

When the Church canonizes one of her children, she takes him apart from the rest of the faithful and enshrines him in a niche among the immortals of her history, whose names will endure until the end of time and whose deeds will be recounted from generation to generation in every quarter of the world, evoking the admiration of millions and inspiring them to emulate the virtues they see exemplified in these close followers of Christ. It is a dignity the conferring of which calls for the exercise of the highest and most sacred prerogative of Christ's Vicar on earth—his infallibility. By solemn decree,

the Sovereign Pontiff proclaims to the universal Church that the soul of the person canonized is most certainly in heaven; and then, after he has commanded the entire Catholic world to render that soul due honor and reverence as a prince of the heavenly kingdom, he himself is the first to kneel before the saint to ask his intercession and to venerate the very ashes of his mortal remains. Honor greater than this cannot be given; nor could it be promised or warranted by any other institution. Only the Catholic Church, whose existence until the end of time is divinely assured, can reward so gloriously and so adequately, the heroes and heroines of Christianity who seek first the kingdom of God and His justice and whose lives are the realization of the beauty and power of her teachings.

Just because canonization is an honor so signal, it is one which the Church is slow to give and one that must be well-deserved. After the dogmatic definition of articles of faith and morals, there is nothing about which she is so cautious and painstaking as the raising of anyone to sainthood. She subjects the one proposed for it to the most crucial of

human tests, and then calls upon God Himself to give His sanction by miracles attesting the holiness of the candidate.

She demands, first of all, unquestionable evidence that the candidate has practised the Christian virtues to a degree that is nothing short of heroic; i.e., he must have endeavored to please God in a manner far more exalted and magnanimous than is commonly attained by the generality of Christians. A soldier in the army will not be cited for special honor unless he has distinguished himself by some heroic feat or exploit in the service of his country; so also the Church singles out for her special honors, only those of her children whose careers on earth have been signalized by heroic acts in the service of God. Any person who is pleasing to God may be called a saint in the broad signification of the term; but as there are degrees of human love and friendship, determined by the amount of good will and acceptableness existing between friends, so too there are grades of sanctity, measured by the generosity and intensity of devotedness with which souls strive to please God. A person who observes faithfully the ten commandments, undoubtedly pleases God

and is deserving a place in heaven. But one who, besides keeping the commandments, voluntarily chooses to observe the gospel counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, to which he is not obligated but which he willingly assumes just to make himself more pleasing to God, certainly such a one is more in favor with the Almighty, than the one who observes merely the common laws of righteousness enjoined upon all men. Hence, the Church requires of one who would attain to the dignity of sainthood, extraordinary efforts to please God by realizing the practice of the Christian virtues to a very high and perfect degree.

This discrimination on the part of the Church does not indicate that she underestimates the noble and holy lives of the thousands of her children who do not reach the heroic in the exercise of virtue. On the battlefield, each and all can be brave and valiant under fire from the enemy, but all cannot be heroes; so in the Church, each and all can be loyal servants of God, but all cannot be heroic saints.

The Church has her own peculiar standards, rigorously exact and always immutable, by which she determines heroism in the prac-

tice of virtue. Pope Benedict XIV who, for twenty-two years prior to his elevation to the papacy, was engaged exclusively in investigating the cases of those who were proposed for beatification and canonization, gives these standards as follows:

Heroic virtue is that which, either because of the excellence of the acts or because of the presence of some circumstance which makes the acts very difficult, shows itself in a manner that surpasses the ordinary standard of acting, so that a man is said to act heroically when he acts beyond the common measure even of people who live virtuously. Moreover it is required that he must have performed not only a few, but many heroic acts; that they must have been performed promptly, easily and with delight; and that they were performed not only with regard to one or two virtues, but with regard to all the virtues as grouped under the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance; that is, it must be established unmistakably, that the candidate has exercised these theological and cardinal virtues by many heroic acts, according to the oppor-

tunities afforded him by the conditions and circumstances of his life.

To ascertain whether the candidate has practised heroic virtue according to these standards, the Church appoints a special commission of learned and experienced ecclesiastics whose duty it is to examine most scrupulously into all the details of his life. If there are any people surviving who knew him or were associated with him, they are summoned to appear before this commission and commanded to give their testimony under oath. If there be no survivors, then the traditions that have been handed down concerning the candidate's reputation for holiness are carefully investigated.

To make the test more difficult and certain, a shrewd and expert inquisitor is appointed, whose office it is to prepare and present arguments showing why the candidate should not be promoted to the honors of the altar. The official title of this person is the "Defender of the Faith," but he is popularly called the "Devil's Advocate." No important act in the processes is of any value unless it takes place formally in his presence.

When the examinations have been com-

pleted, the result is discussed and voted upon in three separate meetings, the third being presided over by the Pope himself. If a favorable decision is reached, the Pope signs a solemn decree declaring that the servant of God has practised the Christian virtues to the point of heroism.

Next, the miracles reported to have been wrought through the intercession of the candidate are investigated. Miracles have always been regarded by the Church as a manifestation of God's approval, and therefore, she will not proceed to so important a matter as infallibly declaring a soul to be in heaven, until God Himself has witnessed to it by miraculous cures performed through the candidate's prayers. She requires that there must be, at least, two first-class miracles: that is, it must be proved to a certainty, on the evidence of medical science and the testimony of learned and trustworthy physicians, that the illness was, humanly speaking, incurable; that the cure was immediate and instantaneous; that the person cured did not suffer a relapse and, finally, that the cure was effected beyond doubt through the intercession of the servant of God. The testimony regarding the miracles

is taken and sifted by a commission of clever and skilful men, whose scrutiny is so fine and exacting that, when they have passed judgment favorably, it would be unreasonable to doubt that the cures are the result of divine intervention.

When the certainty of the miracles has been established, a final meeting is held, at which it is debated whether, in consideration of the heroic virtues of the candidate and the miracles wrought through his intercession, it be proper to elevate him to the honors of the altar. If a majority decide in the affirmative, a decree is issued by the Pope, and a date appointed, not for the canonization, but for the beatification of the servant of God; for thus far, he has reached only the first stage in the process of winning the title to sainthood.

Beatification is, indeed, a declaration on the part of the Church that she considers the person so honored to be numbered among the blessed in heaven, but it is not an infallible decision. Moreover, she merely *permits* public veneration to be shown him, and that only in a restricted manner, i.e., only in certain places, and with certain liturgical acts; so

that it is unlawful to venerate him publicly outside the places having the indult.

Canonization is the second and the final stage in the process leading to the honors of the altar. It is then that the Sovereign Pontiff pronounces his infallible declaration that the saint is in glory; and then, too, that he *commands* the universal Church to honor and venerate him publicly throughout the entire Catholic world.

Usually, several years intervene between beatification and canonization, during which time the Church requires that two more first-class miracles shall have been performed through the intercession of the person beatified. These miracles are investigated in the same manner as for beatification, and it is only when their certainty is proved that she proceeds to the canonization.

This brief synopsis of what the Church exacts for the canonization of a saint, will help to form a correct estimate of the exalted holiness to which Gabriel attained. The severe scrutiny to which his life and virtues were subjected, revealed him to be not only a youthful hero of sanctity, but also one of

those very elect souls whom God raises up, from time to time, to illustrate some important teaching of Christ, or the sanctifying power of some devotion in the Church.

Only thirty years had elapsed since Gabriel's death and there were still living many people who had known him personally or who had lived in close association with him. Three of his own brothers and one sister still survived; also several of his classmates and fellow religious. And, above all, Father Norbert was still alive. All these appeared before the commission and gave their testimony concerning him.

So unanimous and convincing were their depositions in favor of the sanctity of Gabriel, that it was declared in the official documents drawn up by the commission:

> "That Confrater Gabriel practised all manner of virtues in a heroic degree, is clear from the unanimous testimony of all the witnesses, so that he may be held up as an excellent model of the highest perfection. All admired his promptitude and ease in the practice of virtue and spoke of him as a saint. It was evident that he kept before his eyes and in his heart, the examples of Christ and His saints, whom he ever strove

to imitate with the greatest earnestness. He constantly progressed in holiness, no matter what the obstacles might have been. Like a valiant soldier whose courage is tried on the field of battle, the harder the struggle, the more brightly did his perfection shine, so that all his acts might truly be called heroic. In this holy exercise he persevered until death, and no one was ever found to contest his claim to exalted virtue."

CHAPTER XX

BEATIFICATION

"TO JESUS through Mary." This was the motto of Gabriel's life, and the inspiration of all his efforts to attain sanctity. And Mary brought him not only to Jesus, but also to the greatest honors Jesus can bestow upon His closest friends—the honors of the altar in His Church.

The committees appointed to investigate the virtues of Gabriel and the miracles said to have been wrought through his intercession, had sifted with the most exacting scrutiny the sworn evidence of the hundreds of witnesses who had appeared before them to testify concerning his holiness and the wonders performed at his tomb. And when they had completed their examinations, they reported to the Holy See, that it was their unanimous opinion that there could be no doubt about the heroism of his sanctity and the genuineness of the miracles by which God

Himself had attested the holiness of His faithful servant.

Accordingly, on the first day of May, 1908, the Sovereign Pontiff, Pope Pius X, issued a decree declaring that Gabriel was to be numbered among those of her children whom the Church calls *Blessed;* and he assigned the thirty-first of the same month for the solemn ceremony of his beatification. Thus these two great honors came to Gabriel, on the first and the last day of the month that is especially dedicated to Mary, who, after God, was the beginning and the end of the sanctity which had won for him such signal favors.

It was a day of triumph, indeed, for this youthful hero. Gathered within the walls of the great basilica of St. Peter, were thousands of the faithful, hundreds of priests and bishops, twenty-eight cardinals and the Holy Father himself—all come to do homage to Gabriel. Kneeling before his image, enshrined high above the altar, they venerated his relics and burned incense to his honor. Then the mighty dome of that glorious temple rang with their jubilant voices, as they invoked his intercession and supplicated his blessing. The blasts of trumpets and the peal

of bells proclaimed to the other churches of Rome that Gabriel had been enrolled among the Blessed; and then they too joined in the glad rejoicing, so that throughout the breadth and length of the Eternal City, there went up to heaven a pæan of praise to this youth of four-and-twenty who had won the greatest of conquests, the conquest of heroic sanctity over the world, the flesh and the devil.

Among those who assisted at the ceremony of that happy day was Father Norbert. God had prolonged his days that he might witness the glorification of his spiritual son. It was an unique experience indeed, that of being present at the solemn beatification of the disciple he had trained in the way of such sublime sanctity, and one that must have overwhelmed him with deepest joy.

It will be interesting to know the emotions which, on that occasion, filled the soul of the venerable old man who, fifty-two years before, had undertaken the tutorship of Gabriel in the life of exalted virtue which had won for him the triumph of this great day. Fortunately, we are not left to our own imaginings to conjecture what were his sentiments. They have been preserved to us in the following

account written by one who was privileged to have an interview with him.

"A beautiful old man, small of stature and bent under the weight of eighty years, with sharp, keen features, bearing the imprint of long austerities, and a tender sensitive mouth, with a face such as a painter might desire as a model for the aged St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved: such is Father Norbert, the Passionist who, while still a young priest, had the privilege of forming and training in the school of sanctity, the boy Francesco Possenti, whom Rome and all the Church are now honoring and invoking as the Blessed Gabriel of the Addolorata.

"I had said Mass in the room of St. Paul of the Cross, a few days before the beatification of May 31; and as I took my coffee afterwards, the lay brother chanced to tell me that Father Norbert, the novice-master and spiritual director of the Venerable Gabriel, was in the house, having come to Rome for the beatification of his saintly disciple. I was at once fired with the desire to see him and I asked my way to his room. In the corridor I met a priest who told me that he had just come from Father Norbert, who could see no one. I asked if he were ill. 'No; but he is tired, and the old man

has done so much for the cause of the beatification; it is he, in fact, who has made our Gabriel a saint.' I said that that was just why I wished to see him, and that I wanted just to kiss his hand and get his blessing. The Father then very kindly consented to take me to the old man's cell.

"Father Norbert received me with the greatest kindness and graciousness, and soon began to talk of his beloved son. Before him there were spread out several lives of Blessed Gabriel, including the new one which had been prepared for the beatification by the postulator, Padre Germano di San Stanislao. He told me that this life was so beautifully done that it seemed as if Father Germano had been really inspired, so wonderfully had he entered into the inner life and heart of the young saint, whom he had never known in this life.

"I asked him about the portraits and he said that none of them were like the Beato. There had been no portraits of him taken during his life, and all the painter had to go by were verbal descriptions given by himself and by the late General of the Order (who had been B. Gabriel's companion in the novitiate) and others who had known him. But it is manifestly impossible to make a life-like portrait from mere descriptions. He said the portraits usually seen,

representing the young Passionist gazing down on a table where there is a picture of our Lady of Pity, a skull and a discipline, are taken from a painting which is preserved in the monastery of the Scala Santa, and which is said by competent critics to be artistically of the very highest merit. A copy of this was over the tomb at Isola. But it is not he; it is not nearly beautiful enough. The light of his interior graces shone out so in the boy's face that he was a marvel of spiritual beauty. The new portrait which was given away at the solemn beatification, and which adorns the new book, is most like him of any. Some features are really like him, but on the whole it is not he.

"When the old man spoke of his beloved son, his eyes filled with tears and a beautiful smile lit up his face.

"I asked him which had been Gabriel's special characteristic virtue; and he said that he had often asked himself that question but never could he answer it, for Gabriel had all the virtues in so pre-eminent and extraordinary a degree that it was impossible to distinguish. 'But,' he added, 'the special feature of his spiritual life was his extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Virgin: for her he was *appassionato-pazzo.*'

"An impassioned love for Mary was in-

deed this boy's distinctive grace. He was always talking of her; he died pressing burning kisses on her picture; he was her slave, her champion, her knight. Nothing, I suppose, can show more clearly the immense graces that flow from devotion to the Mother of God than this dear boy's short life. From the day when, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1856, she fixed her merciful eyes upon him and called him from the vanities and pleasures of the world to the austerest life known to the Church of God, he never looked back, never faltered in his onward progress; so that in six short years he had attained the sublimest heights of sanctity. And it was Father Norbert's hand that had guided him up those steep ascents of Calvary; it was he who had encouraged him in his generosity, who had given him the example and the help he needed, and restrained him from the indiscreet mortifications after which his ardent zeal panted, while he mortified his spirit in a hundred more salutary ways. It was in obeying Father Norbert's commands that Gabriel drew closer and ever closer to the Sacred Heart, and it was fortified by his aid that he met his early death so sweetly and so blithely.

"Short of seeing the saint himself, I can imagine no greater privilege than this of

talking to him who, under God, had made him a saint. It was indeed good to sit in that poor, little cell and hear the old man talk. The six-and-forty years since the saintly boy had died seemed but a day to his aged master and Gabriel is always present with him. 'I knew indeed,' he said, 'that he was a saint and I expected that God would show some signs of this to the world in His own time, but I confess that I never expected such an extraordinary manifestation of miraculous graces as have been poured out in answer to his prayers. Oh, what prodigies, what prodigies! The thousandth part of them will never be known. The pilgrims flock in crowds to his tomb at Isola, day after day, all to ask some favor or to give thanks for one received. But only a very small portion of the reports ever come to our ears.' And then he told me that when the Apostolic Delegates came to Isola for the recognition of the relics of the Servant of God in 1892, a sudden shower burst over the monastery which inundated it with rain, while the country around was dry. This was taken to be a presage of the extraordinary shower of miracles which then began to happen in that favored spot.

"Father Norbert told me, too, that Gabriel's extraordinary devotion to Mary is

recompensed by her in a very special manner. Sometimes these miracles are accompanied by the apparition of the Mother of God, sometimes by that of her faithful servant.

"At least once, when prayers were made to our Lady of Lourdes for a miraculous cure, the Blessed Virgin appeared to the suppliant and told her to make her application to her son, Gabriel, who would himself cure her. On another occasion when a nun was cured, our Blessed Lady appeared to the sufferer, but Gabriel appeared at the same time in an adjoining room to the infirmarian and told her that the Blessed Virgin was about to work this cure. These stories, which I believe to be well authenticated, and many others quite as wonderful, were told me by the old Passionist who recounted them with the greatest delight.

"It would seem that the lesson of the Blessed Gabriel's life is just this—that if we will only observe the duties of our state with fidelity and love, we may become saints as he did. He is a saint pre-eminently to be imitated. There is nothing in his life above the power of any one who has the grace of God to help him. But he despised the world, he loved the Cross, and he made unceasing war upon his own nature.

"This is what I gathered from my talk

with the venerable Passionist, a talk that I can never forget. I asked him if the Blessed Gabriel had ever appeared to him after his death. He said with his beautiful smile: 'No, I always prayed to him not to come to me, for I am not curious. I hope to see him in paradise. But he has appeared to many, many others.' I said: 'No doubt when your turn comes to die, Father, he will come and assist you, as you assisted him in his last agony.' And the old man smiling, said, 'Yes, I think he will; for he always had a grateful heart.'

"A few days later, on the morning of the beatification, I happened to arrive at the side door of St. Peter's just as Father Norbert drove up. And thus I had the privilege of seeing the old man again and congratulating him on this day of triumph, and of kissing once more the hands that Gabriel had so often kissed. He was radiant, but almost bewildered with joy. I gave him my arm to help him up the steps, and so we entered the basilica together. And of all my recollections of that glorious day, the picture that I love to linger on most is that of the aged Passionist kneeling at the feet of the Vicar of Christ and receiving with a radiant smile, his congratulations. For in the afternoon I had the privilege of a place just behind the old man in the tribune re-

served for the Passionist Fathers. And when Benediction was over, and the Holy Father was still kneeling at the faldstool, venerating the relics of the new Beato, some one came to call the General of the Order from the tribune and with him, Father Norbert and the old lay brother from Isola, Fra Silvestro, who had also known Blessed Gabriel intimately. And then as the Pope still knelt below us before the altar, we saw the little series of presentations made. First, Don Michael Possenti, the elder brother of Blessed Gabriel, was brought forward and with tears in his eyes he knelt before the Vicar of Christ, who had just solemnly proclaimed the beatitude of the brother who had loved him so dearly. Then came four ladies, nieces of the Beato.

"Then the General was presented; and last of all we saw Father Norbert. It was beautiful to see the way the Pope welcomed him and the tender interest with which he addressed him. And then he put his hand on the old man's forehead and blessed him, and so the culminating point of Father Norbert's day of triumph was reached.

"He had entered the basilica unobserved and unknown, but it was not so now. As he was led out between two lay brothers, priests and people struggled to get near him to kiss his hand. It was almost too much

for the old man's strength, but through it all he preserved the same air of sweet serenity and radiant joy, as of a peace that the world could not give and could not take away.

"And as I watched him, I felt that so must the aged Simeon have looked as he left the temple of old, singing his *Nunc Dimittis.*"

Note: Father Norbert died three years later, on the 19th of June, 1911. The reputation of his own sanctity has spread far and wide.

CHAPTER XXI

CANONIZATION

SPLENDID and glorious as was Gabriel's triumph on the day of his beatification, still it was but the prelude to higher honors yet to come. On that day the Church, indeed, glorified him as one whose place in heaven might not be questioned and, accordingly, permitted her children to salute him with the veneration his sanctity so well deserved. But she did not pronounce the infallible decision by which she declared him to be undoubtedly a saint of God; nor did she issue her mandate ordaining that he must be honored as a saint throughout the universal Church. These final and supreme honors she still held in reserve and would not bestow them until God Himself had manifested His approval by signs and wonders so evidently supernatural that there could remain no reasonable doubt that He Himself had wrought them for the further exaltation of His beloved servant.

It was not long until the divine sanction was given. Within less than a year after Gabriel's beatification, more than fifty thousand pilgrims had flocked to his tomb at Isola which was not easy of access in those days, when the journey had to be performed on foot or by slow and infrequent stages. Cures of all manner of diseases, from the simplest to those most baffling to medical science, were effected there; and the number swelled into hundreds, as is attested by the votive offerings still preserved on the walls of the chapel.

Nor was the shrine at Isola the only scene of the divine favors dispensed by God through the mediation of Gabriel. Reports attesting the graces, spiritual and temporal, obtained through his prayers, came pouring in from almost every quarter of the Catholic world; so that he came to be called the Thaumaturgus of the twentieth century. The marvels attributed to him during that short time were so many and wonderful that the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius X, on the fourteenth of May, 1908, named a commission of competent judges who were to pass upon the miraculousness of at least two of the cures to be submitted to their investigation, which were to be taken as the

final evidences entitling Gabriel to canonization.

The two cures selected are here given. The first was the instantaneous restoration to health of one John Baptist Cerro. For fifty years this man had led the simple life of a peasant, his only occupation being that of a farmer. During all these years, he had never known a day of ill health. Then he began to experience severe pains in the joints of his limbs, which, later on, attacked his spine. The disease became so aggravated that at last he could no longer walk except with the assistance of a cane, and even then only with great difficulty and suffering.

The physician diagnosed his case to be one of *arthritis deformans,* and *ankylosis* of the spinal column. And after careful examination, he pronounced it to be incurable. The only remedies employed were a few hot baths, which failed to produce any relief of the patient's sufferings. For fifteen years the poor man endured ever-increasing pains, and during that period, he lost even the power of walking with the aid of a cane.

At this time, a triduum of thanksgiving for the beatification of Blessed Gabriel was being

conducted at the monastery of Forli, the little town where John was then living. He begged his friends to carry him to the church that he might attend the exercises of the triduum, saying that he was quite confident that Gabriel would hear his prayers and cure him of his malady.

On the third day of the triduum, as it was about to close, John and his friends renewed their supplications with greater earnestness and devotion. Suddenly, he felt a thrill go through his entire body, which, for a moment, caused a paroxysm of pain. Then, leaping from his invalid's chair, the sick man shouted that he was cured. When the astonishment and joy of those present had subsided, he was led to the physician, he himself walking erect and unassisted all the way. On examination, he was found to be completely cured from the affliction that had tortured him through fifteen years. The next day he began working in the fields, and he continued to enjoy perfect health.

The second cure was that of Aloysius Parise, of Gallipoli, a carpenter and joiner by trade. While attempting to lift a heavy door, he suffered an abdominal rupture which was

so severe and occasioned so much pain, that he was unconscious for several hours. Medical treatment afforded him only small relief, and for eleven years he suffered from the effects of the accident, which the physician called *inveterate hernia of the right inguinal.* During this time, he was able to do only the lightest work requiring no strain of any kind.

After trying various remedies, Aloysius had recourse to a distinguished surgeon, who assured him that a surgical operation was imperative, and was the only possible cure for his affliction. Aloysius refused to submit to such an operation; and as a last resource, turned to Blessed Gabriel, whose fame for obtaining cures had reached Gallipoli.

Hardly had he commenced his supplications than Aloysius felt himself instantly cured. The surgeon who had examined him but a short while before, found that every trace of the hernia had disappeared, and that his restoration to health was perfect and complete. He was able to resume immediately the heavy and difficult work of his trade, and never again experienced the slightest annoyance from the effects of the accident that had

caused him so much suffering for more than eleven years.

These two miracles were passed upon favorably by the commission, and the cause of Gabriel's canonization would have been concluded in a short time, except for the disturbed conditions occasioned by the outbreak of the World War, and the untimely death of Pius X.

The cause was resumed, however, in 1918, when the late Pontiff, Benedict XV, directed the Sacred Congregation of Rites to review the judgment already passed by the commission appointed by his predecessor. Finally, after mature deliberation and wise consultation with the cardinals, his official advisors, the same Holy Father declared on January 6, 1920, that Gabriel was to be crowned with the honors of canonization; and later on, he issued a Bull to that effect, and appointed May 13 of the same year, as the date for the public ceremony.

When that day dawned, St. Peter's was thronged with more than sixty thousand people, some of them having journeyed from far distant lands to be present at the crowning glorification of Gabriel.

The pomp of the Church's ritual for the canonization of a saint beggars description. Therefore I shall not attempt to portray the magnificence of the decorations which adorned that grandest of earthly temples, nor the brilliancy of the long procession which, for nearly an hour, filed into the basilica from the halls of the Vatican, composed as it was of the members of all the religious orders and congregations clothed in their picturesque habits of black, and brown, and gray, and white; the students, clerics and professors of the Roman colleges and universities; the nobles and the various orders of the Papal Court, lay, military and ecclesiastical, in their splendid dress and glittering insignia; the bishops and prelates attired in the royal purple of their office; the cardinals in their magnificent robes of lustrous scarlet; and last of all, the Pope himself, carried in the *sedia gestatoria,* on the shoulders of twelve stalwart knights, and surrounded by the Swiss and Palatine Guards in their gorgeous uniforms.

Neither shall I tell of the wondrous harmonies of music discoursed by the papal choirs; nor of the awful majesty of the Pontifical Mass celebrated over the tomb of

St. Peter; nor of the salute from the silver trumpets high up in the mighty dome, which seemed like an echo from heaven itself; nor of the hush that fell over that vast throng of worshippers when the Sovereign Pontiff mounted his throne and with the authority of Christ's Vicar, pronounced these solemn and momentous words:

> "For the honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the increase and glory of the Catholic Faith, by the authority of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and of our own, after mature deliberation, and with the counsel of Our Venerable Brothers, the Cardinals, the Patriarchs, the Archbishops and the Bishops, we decree Blessed Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother, professed cleric of the Congregation of Discalced Clerks of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, to be a Saint; and we command him to be inscribed in the catalogue of the Saints."

Nor shall I try to tell of the outburst of triumphant joy that went up from the throats of that multitude of the faithful, as they united in singing the *Te Deum,* that made the very walls of St. Peter's tremble as they rever-

berated the words of that peerless hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Triune God.

To me, the most impressive moment of all that splendid ceremony was when I beheld the Pope and his princely court of cardinals and prelates, who represented the oldest, the mightiest, the wisest and the most stable of powers on earth, on their knees before the image of this young saint who, not quite sixty years before, had died almost unknown in the mountain wilds of Isola del Gran Sasso. And I thought how true that Church is to her teachings and principles, which maintain that the only real glory in her eyes is the glory of those who, having renounced themselves and all worldly ambitions, have lived their lives for Christ alone and moulded their characters after His noble precepts and example.

I thought, too, how democratic she is, and how regardless of the persons of men, when she prostrates herself before a youth without earthly rank and distinction, and honors him with the fullness of her glory and the prodigality of her praise!

At that moment, too, I seemed to see the lips of Gabriel's image move and to hear the

sound of his voice, as he smiled upon the kneeling crowds and repeated the words of her whom he loved so dearly and called his Queen, and who was the inspiration of his sanctity: "Behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed; for He that is mighty hath done great things unto me, and holy is His name."

Present at this last and greatest honor it was in the power of the Church to bestow upon Gabriel, was his own favorite brother, Signor Michael Possenti. It has been said that this fact of one brother assisting at the canonization of the other, is unexampled in the history of the Church's canonizations in modern times. White and venerable with fourscore years, he knelt before the image of his brother and prayed to him with an earnestness that seemed to carry his soul in rapture to heaven itself, where he knew for a certainty that his own flesh and blood was glorified for evermore.

The writer had the privilege of holding four long conversations with Signor Possenti, from which he learned many of the facts recorded in these pages. At this writing he is still alive, and we are informed that he serves

the Mass celebrated daily at the altar erected to the honor of his sainted brother.

. . . . . .

And now that the Church has wreathed Gabriel's brow with her highest glory and has given him a shrine in her temple until the end of time, we may well close this narrative of his career.

In telling the story of this recent saint, it was not difficult to recount the facts, the incidents, the thoughts, the emotions, the expressions, the virtues that filled the twenty-four years of his short life. It was an easy and pleasant task to portray the worldly-minded youth knocking for admission at the monastery door of the Passionist novitiate at Morrovale, and then to see him conforming himself with unswerving exactness to all the requirements of that religious life which held up before him as its motto: "Crucify thyself." But it was not so easy and so pleasant for him to do all this.

In our narrative, we could only outline the battling, the striving and the restraining that went on constantly within his mind and heart. He alone can tell us adequately of the conflict between nature and grace that was

waged in his interior, day after day, in his effort to root out the worldly ways and ideas and ambitions he had fostered so tenderly, but which he now found to be in diametrical contradition to the ways, the ideas and the ambitions which, henceforth, must influence and sway his life—a life whose ideals summoned him to things far above the mere precepts and commands of the gospel, to things so heroic that Christ Himself said that only the chosen few could take them unto themselves.

There is many a one capable, so to speak, of winding himself up for one great effort, even though it be to perish in the attempt; but to wage a ceaseless warfare against what is nearest and dearest, against one's comfort and ease and likes and dislikes, is a task comparatively few have the courage to accomplish. Yet it is this which constitutes heroism of the highest type; it is this which Christ terms being fastened to the Cross with Him, and wherein consists the sublimest perfection and the noblest achievement.

This conforming of Gabriel's life to the doctrine of the Cross, is all the more significant when it is remembered that he lived, not in the first days of Christianity when the

fervor of faith burned brightly in the hearts of Christ's followers, nor even in the Ages of Faith, so prolific in holy men and sainted women. He was a youth of our own times, a contemporary with some who may read these pages. His tastes, his ideas, his sympathies were similar to those that characterize our own days. He was surrounded with all the loose notions of liberty and independence and personal aggrandizement and pleasure that are familiar to the youths we see around us now. Yet he rose superior to it all, and chose to be humble and submissive, and poor and lowly for Christ and His love.

But Gabriel's poverty and simplicity and submissiveness and humility are now honored by God as never the deeds of king and monarch have been honored. Only sixty years have elapsed since he died almost nameless to the world; yet today, in all the world, there is not a statesman or a ruler, not a philosopher or a philanthropist, who is glorified as is this youthful follower of the Cross and the Crucified.

For unnumbered generations still to come, Gabriel's tomb will be a shrine where the mighty ones of the earth will gather to ven-

erate his relics, while they admire the lowliness of the humility that has raised him to an eminence so sublime. Here will come the wise and the learned, to bow before him and contemplate the blessed wisdom that taught him to hide his life with Christ in God. Here, too, will come youths and maidens, to catch up his spirit and to consecrate themselves to God, and like him, to show to the world the power and the wisdom of the Cross—that Cross which is indeed to them that perish, foolishness, but to them that are saved, the power and the wisdom of God.

Thus the life of Gabriel, simple and uneventful as it was, will be a giant power in the Church during long centuries yet to come. It will be like a beacon light set in a watch tower, guiding to safety many a youth, tempest-tossed on the engulfing sea of an unchristian and dissolute world.

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